TWILIGHT OF PAINTING

R. H. IVES GAMMELL

TWILIGHT OF PAINTING

by R. H. Ives Gammell

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Cover: Detail from the final panel of R.H. Ives Gammell's
pictorial sequence based on Francis Thompson's ***The Hound of Heaven***

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To the painter, born or unborn, who shall lift the
art of painting from the low estate to which it has fallen,
this book is hopefully dedicated.

Those who have undertaken to write on our art and have represented it as a kind of inspiration, as a gift bestowed upon peculiar favorites at their birth, seem to insure a much more favorable disposition from their readers, and have a much more captivating and liberal air than he who attempts to examine, coldly, whether there are any means by which this art may be acquired, how the mind may be strengthened and expanded, and what guides will show the way to eminence.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: Discourses

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INTRODUCTION

R.H. Ives Gammell is a unique figure in American art history by virtue of both the time in which he lived and his accomplishments.

Born in 1893 to a wealthy Providence, R.I. family, he was raised in an environment of Edwardian privilege. By the age of ten he knew that painting was to be his metier. The pursuit of this career took him into a world far removed from the comfortable drawing-room culture of his parents and, as contemporary painters and their literary sycophants moved further and further into what he considered the quagmire of "modern art," to an isolated position totally outside the existing critical and artistic establishments. He voiced his beliefs clearly and forcefully and in no way softened his criticism to gain personal recognition or tactical advantage. He spoke the truth as he saw it without regard to the personal and professional criticism which could and did result.

Gammell is one of the few allegorical painters this country has produced. His major works are complex pictures which use classical, religious, contemporary cultural and imaginative elements to deal, in visual terms, with the deepest human psychic experiences. They are difficult pictures which make their beholder work. Even his landscapes and portraits carry an element of artistic intensity that precludes the use of pretty adjectives.

By the end of World War II Gammell was convinced that the fabric of art education, which had historically produced well-trained painters, had ceased to exist. This conviction caused him to reorient his life: he began to teach students and he began to write down what he knew about the art and craft of painting. He taught and wrote until his death in 1981.

As a teacher he tried to provide his students with the training necessary to solve the problems suggested by the creative impulse. In addition to training in painting's technical aspects he insisted that his students be exposed to literature, drama and music of their own and prior periods so as to give them a sense of place in the continuity of human creative expression. In his thirty-five years of active teaching close to eighty men and women studied with Gammell. Of these, some stayed only long enough to discover

that painting was not to be their life's work. But of those who completed their training and have become working painters, fully six have also taken up the responsibility of training yet another generation of painters. It is this increasing group of young, well-trained men and women who are keeping alive the art of painting which R.H. Ives Gammell feared would be lost.

In the forty-four years since its first publication, ***Twilight of Painting*** has continued to be read by students of painting, collectors and scholars who are concerned by the movement of contemporary culture away from prior human experience. The republication of this book comes at a point when ***Time*** magazine asks in a lead article, "What is a picture worth?" (Nov. 27, 1989). It will not provide an answer in dollars and cents but offers a systematic basis for artistic evaluation which is so sorely needed in our culture, where so many know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Elizabeth Ives Hunter

PREFACE

THE PURPOSE of this book is twofold. It is primarily an attempt to put before the reading public a painter's estimate of the factors which have brought the art of painting to its present state. It is also an attempt to analyze those factors for the benefit of the genuinely talented young people who, sooner or later, will address themselves to the task of rediscovering for their own use the now all-but-lost craft of picturemaking.

It is the second of these two objectives which I have chiefly at heart. For twenty years or more the predicament of all potential artists earnestly setting out to learn the art of painting has been a tragic one. Until quite recently there were still with us a few painters technically equipped to teach students the knowledge and skills necessary for the practice of their difficult art. But, owing to conditions which I propose to discuss in this book, contacts between these older men and sufficiently talented members of the younger generations were not established. These older painters have now died and a large part of their wisdom has perished with them. Some surviving fragments of the great painting traditions, however, remain in the possession of a small and steadily dwindling handful of painters. Even these fragments of a once vast body of professional knowledge would be of inestimable value to serious students, but are not readily accessible to them. Painters capable of imparting this knowledge have for years lacked both credit and influence in the world of art. The tragedy of this situation seems likely to be recognized too late. Inevitably a time will come when every scrap of information throwing light on the working methods of painters belonging to a still recent past will be eagerly sought. While I hope this book may be of service to art students curious about such matters, it is addressed to the general reader. For there is little hope of a genuine upturn in the art of painting until the larger art-loving public reaches a better understanding of the way painting is practiced and taught today and of the developments which led to the adoption of contemporary methods of painting and teaching.

During the past few years the market has been flooded with books on "art," but books dealing with painting, as it is understood by the trained professional painter, have been conspicuously lacking. However, as this book is addressed primarily to the nonpainter, I have avoided technical matters as much as possible, it being my inten-

tion to deal with some of these in a later volume. But a book about painting is necessarily a book about the painter's way of working, for painting is an art in which the artist's means of expression and what he has to express are inextricably intermingled. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the technique and the artist are one. A painter's execution bears the stamp of his personality at every point and his emotional expression is strictly limited and shaped by his technical equipment.

For this very reason I have given a good deal of space to the subject of teaching and the painter's training. The overwhelming importance which teaching plays in the growth of a school of painting, as well as in the development of the individual painter, is surprisingly little understood. A painter necessarily starts off with a method of work he has learned from his master, usually long before his own particular esthetic purpose has crystallized in his mind. The way of painting which he has learned will materially affect that crystallization when it takes place in his maturer years. Conversely, as he grows aware of his particular aims, the artist is usually forced to develop his technical equipment in a new direction. He is fortunate indeed if he finds that his teacher has given him a sufficiently broad technical base on which to build an edifice of his own choosing. In any case, the training he received in his formative years will leave its mark, for better or worse, on all his thinking about painting, as well as on the pictures he paints. The present deterioration of painting standards is directly due to the bad teaching methods prevailing during the past forty years, and there is no likelihood of a resurgence of the art until a sound method of training is made available to our potential painters. The creation of such a method should be the chief concern of all who are interested in the future of American painting.

The subject of painting today is emotionally toned for many people, and any discussion of contemporary art is certain to arouse animosity. This is extremely unfortunate, for only an impersonal and judicial approach is likely to lead to intelligent understanding. I have endeavored to present my case as objectively as possible and hope that the reader will weigh my material in a similar spirit. With a view to keeping my argument free of personalities I have avoided mentioning living American painters. It seemed essential, however, that some photographs of "modern" pictures be presented for comparison. I have tried to assemble a group made from reproductions of paintings in public collections, choosing only pictures by foreign artists whom I understand to be internationally recognized leaders of the "modern" movement and whose very celebrity should place them beyond the reach of any critical implications. Regrettably, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the museums which contain what I am told are the two most representative collections of Modern Painting in this country, have both refused me permission to publish photographs of their "modern" pictures in this book. I am very much indebted to the Wadsworth Athenaeum at Hartford and to the Art Institute of Chicago for their help and courtesy in this connection.

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TWILIGHT OF PAINTING

CHAPTER I

Twilight of Painting

Comparatively few people care for art at all, and most of these care for it because they mistake it for something else.
ARTHUR SYMONS

THE singular product of human activity known as Modern Art in the era between the two World Wars will be a subject of serious discussion for many years to come. Unless the recorded experience of mankind in these matters is contradicted in this particular case, future generations are not likely to value many of the pictures produced during the last quarter of a century. But, even if it should turn out that most of the paintings we have learned to call "modern" are regarded as worthless rubbish by posterity, there are many reasons why the movement of which these pictures are a visible expression will deserve the careful scrutiny of historians as well as of painters.

For one thing, the painting characteristic of the years preceding the catastrophe of 1939 will certainly be studied as a symptom of the profound spiritual disruption of that distressful era. Many psychiatrists were quick to recognize the symptomatic significance of "modern" painting. Seen in retrospect, this significance is likely to appear far greater than it does today. For it will not require a very penetrating observation to perceive that the art of painting itself was really a matter of very little concern to the vast majority of enthusiasts so busily engaged in talking and writing about pictures or in covering acres of canvas with paint. In fact, the outstanding trait of this so-called Renaissance of Painting is the profound indifference of most of its devotees to the very things which for centuries have been considered, by artists and picture lovers alike, essential qualities of that art. Beautiful workmanship, fine drawing, balanced composition, the sensitive rendering of the phenomena of the visible world—these things, or, at any rate, the things formerly connoted by these words, are ignored or are openly condemned by present-day practitioners of painting as well as by their propagandists. One wonders what ever led these legions of earnest and excited people to turn their attention to painting at all. Why have so many men and women, in recent years, devoted so much time and energy to an art for which they manifestly have little aptitude or liking? One thing appears certain. They have been guided by impulses and motives profoundly dissimilar from those which impelled the painters of the past to dedicate their lives to the pursuit of an exacting calling.

That so huge a number of persons have become emotionally involved in a form

of expression which resembles a parody of painting, as the world has hitherto known it, seems to defy any rational explanation. It is really very remarkable how few people are struck by the strangeness of this phenomenon. Yet surely it has no parallel in history. If we consider that, for centuries, picture-painting was universally recognized as an outstandingly difficult craft, within the reach of only a small number of gifted individuals in each generation, and requiring a long and arduous apprenticeship; if we also remember how tiny a percentage of the work executed by even this little band of highly trained painters has proved of enduring interest, the new streamlined conception of an ancient art should give anyone pause. For, in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, persons calling themselves painters were numbered by tens of thousands in the United States alone, more than we find mentioned in the most comprehensive encyclopedias listing the eminent artists of all nations and all periods, prior to, say, 1850. And this host of self-styled painters does not include the countless men, women, and children engaged in painting as a hobby, a cultural diversion, or a form of occupational therapy. The contrast afforded between the attitude toward the art of painting suggested by these figures and the older view is striking enough to startle the most superficial observer.

Still more striking is the contrast between the canvases turned out by these legions of brush-wielders and the pictures treasured by previous generations. The general quality and execution of most of these productions is just about what a painter familiar with work done in high-school art classes or in third-rate art schools would expect from ill-trained and insufficiently talented persons. Real training in the art of painting they have not had and, as a rule, have not wanted. And it is an obvious truism, abundantly demonstrated by history, that nature is parsimonious in her bestowal of genuine artistic talent. The amazing thing about this huge output of pictures is not their obvious badness. It is the simply astounding fact that they should have been taken seriously by anyone besides the painters themselves and, perhaps, their friends and relatives. One would suppose that any person with reasonably normal eyesight could perceive the grotesqueness of 90 per cent of these pictures, though he might be unable to appreciate the mediocrity of most of the remaining 10 per cent. But the walls of our great public museums are being hung with amateurish and immature efforts bought with funds entrusted to those institutions for the purchase of works of art. Huge exhibitions are held throughout the land and are viewed, with little articulate disapproval, by large crowds of people. Reproductions of these wretchedly executed paintings appear in popular magazines, occasioning no particular surprise. And a certain number of them are actually bought by people of moderate means and hang in the living rooms of private houses.

In no other era have civilized men given serious attention to representations similarly devoid of skill, plausibility, or beauty without first attributing to them a religious or magical significance. But, here in our own time, large sections of an educated

public have looked solemnly at canvases covered with clumsily applied daubs of paint and have accepted as a fact the view that a number of these efforts, not discernibly very different from the others, are actually fine works of art. What has led these people, most of whom prove to be perfectly rational and clearheaded in other activities, to make or accept judgments so contrary to the evidence of their own senses? Can it be that in our superrational and materialistic civilization the primitive urge to revere the incomprehensible and to give it a supernatural significance finds in this "art" a substitute for what was formerly an element of religion? It is certainly suggestive that the justifications made for these pictures are more frequently couched in the language of an emotional mysticism than in terms of everyday experience or in the clear-cut professional terminology of painting. It has been frequently noted, too, that no "modern" painter has been accepted by the public without first being interpreted to them by one or more writers. The highfalutin and often incomprehensible verbiage in which these apologias are written has now become familiar to the reading public.[1]

A single example will suffice to suggest their tone. The following sentences, taken almost at random from current art criticism, are typical of the more intelligible present-day writing about painting. The writer characterizes the work of two Russian "modern" painters of international fame as follows:

> Both have mystical qualities, almost religious in fervor, and both can use color hysterically [sic] or with restraint. They are powerful, often esthetic [sic], and behind most of what they offer is a deep strain of intellectual content.

The unwary reader of lines like these probably gets a general impression that artists so described must be very profound persons indeed and that their pictures communicate important messages. Certainly such a reader would find it difficult to explain the exact meaning of these portentous phrases, and so, I suspect, would their author. But there is no denying that a large number of people do become drugged or hypnotized by this kind of language to a degree that makes it possible for them to stand before the most infantile attempts at painting and really experience some sort of emotional uplift. Without a verbal preparation no rational adult could have failed to see that the celebrated works which elicited the lines quoted above were childishly drawn, crude and haphazard in color, lacking in composition or pattern, and either incomprehensible or trivial in subject. Why is it that people today are ready to accept Delphic utterances in artistic matters instead of trusting their own eyesight and the

[1] The reader will find an admirable study of this sort of writing in *Defence of Art* by Christine Herter (W. W. Norton, 1940). Miss Herter's is one of the very few books on art published during the last twenty-five years which treats of painting from the standpoint of the trained painter.

faculties which govern their daily activities? How have these things come to pass?

These questions are of exceptional interest, and answers to them will be sought by many men approaching the problem from widely different angles. The final solution to the problem posed by Modern Painting will doubtless elude investigators for some years to come. A considerable lapse of time will be required to put contemporary developments into the perspective essential for a valid judgment. The ultimate explanation of the emotional background which has made the Modern Painting movement possible and its manifestations acceptable to a large public will probably be given us by psychiatrists and psychologists. But it does not seem that the significance of Modern Painting can be properly interpreted by men versed in these sciences unless they give some consideration to the judgment of the professional painters, trained in the traditional methods of their art, who have watched from the vantage points of their studios the changes taking place during the last forty years. The literature devoted to Modern Painting has emanated almost entirely from persons who have never painted at all or whose attempts to paint only served to reveal their inability to master the traditional techniques of the art. The ideas of some of these writers may be illuminating, but no balanced view of the situation can be reached while the estimate of the trained practitioners is lacking.

Viewed simply as an historical phenomenon or as a symptom of the psychosis of an era this extraordinary manifestation is important enough to warrant careful analysis. But Modern Painting cannot be tossed aside as a mere psychological curiosity. For, although the "modern" movement seems little concerned with painting as such, the activities it has set in motion cannot fail to exert a deep and prolonged influence on the future development of the art. The aftereffects will be very great, no matter what value our children or our grandchildren attach to the pictures produced in our time. Each generation of painters is inevitably governed in its expression by the limitations of the technical equipment they receive from their teachers. The ultimate importance of Modern Painting in the history of art will be seen to lie in the fact that it discredited and virtually destroyed the great technical traditions of European painting, laboriously built up through the centuries by a long succession of men of genius. The loss of these traditions has deprived our potential painters of their rightful heritage, a heritage without which it will be impossible for them to give full scope to such talent as they may possess.

To assume, as many people do, that Modern Painting is the ultimate refinement of an art brought to its highest pitch by technical *virtuosi* is to wholly misunderstand its character. The common denominator which binds together the various sects and schools of painting called "modern" today is their incompetence in the very art they profess to practice, their common inability to paint even passably well, according to previously accepted standards. It is notable that any painter who, in recent years, has acquired even a partial mastery of the traditional methods of painting, has

been branded as "academic" or "reactionary." Conversely, when, as has occasionally happened, a fairly able painter has begun to turn out slovenly work, from laziness, failing faculties, or a desire to be in the fashion, he has been hailed as a convert to modernism and not infrequently crowned with the laurels denied his more conscientious efforts.

The revolutionary and experimental trends which have profoundly affected all the arts in the last thirty years were not primarily responsible for the deterioration of painting, though they unquestionably accelerated the later stages of the disintegration. But the weakness of the technical tradition of painting at the time of their appearance made it the favorite medium of expression for the irrational emotional impulses whose eruption into the field of the fine arts has been so notable a feature of our time. By the early years of this century the transmission of the working methods of painting evolved by the masters had been seriously impaired. This was not immediately apparent because a number of excellent painters, trained in the seventies and eighties, still lived on, some of them into the nineteen-twenties. But, as these surviving artists of an older era died off, it became evident how little of their knowledge and skill they had passed on to their successors. The right to speak with authority on matters pertaining to pictures was denied these older men during their later years, and this right was never accorded to any painter of the succeeding generations, except by his own little coterie of followers and admirers. By the middle nineteen-twenties painting was a profession lacking thoroughly equipped practitioners, universally recognized masters, and any widely accepted criterion of merit. It was therefore an easy matter for the experimentalists, the perennial art students, the amateurs, the esthetes, the art experts, and the lunatic fringes to impose on the world their own standards and conceptions of painting. In the nature of things these groups made up a huge numerical majority of the people actively interested in pictures. It was perhaps natural that the general public accepted their judgment with such remarkable docility. The result was the complete disintegration and collapse of the art of painting which we have witnessed in the last fifteen years.

It seems an ungrateful task to call attention to the low standards of workmanship currently accepted in painting today, while a large and highly articulate group are deriving deep satisfaction from the belief that they are actually sharing in a great artistic revival. But in no event can so ill-founded an illusion last very long. The entire history of painting demonstrates that only pictures possessing some form of craftsmanship in a very high degree have enduring interest. It can serve no genuinely useful purpose to identify bad painting with great art just to make innumerable bad painters feel that they are important artists. We have recently had only too many occasions to learn the disastrous consequences which follow when fundamental truths are concealed or distorted in order to maintain a superficially pleasant state of affairs.

My purpose is to be constructive. The estimate of contemporary painting ex-

pressed in these pages is not put forward in a spirit of carping criticism. Still less is it aimed at any particular painters or types of painting. It is a conscientious effort to set down the facts as they are, calling a spade a spade, in the belief that only through a general realization of the steady decline of the art of painting will the situation begin to improve. A genuine upturn will take place only when young people born with marked talent for painting are provided with opportunities for learning their trade. At best, each generation produces but a small number of boys or girls endowed with the exceptional combination of talents necessary for the making of a painter of distinction. The only effective way to foster a national art is to make it possible for these potential painters to develop their talents to the utmost. This they can only do if they receive the necessary training during their formative years. It is my hope that, by comparing the conditions prevailing today with those existing in the eras which produced fine painting, I may help to hasten the day when some young artist, marked with the seal of great talent, will be enabled to dispel the twilight which has descended upon the art of painting and will lay the foundation of a genuine renascence.

CHAPTER II

The New Standard

And now from their midst the Dilettante stalks abroad. The amateur is loosed. The voice of the aesthete is heard in the land, and catastrophe is upon us.

WHISTLER: *Ten O'Clock*

Besides, these are men of letters, having hardly a footing in the studios, and knowing of the secrets of the trade only what can be seen through cracks and keyholes. Is it quite certain that they understand anything at all? And would it not be surprising to see them, at the first stroke, put their fingers on the truths which escape us, and make us agree on the very points of discord which divide us?

EUGENE FROMENTIN: *Fragment of a manuscript, "A Critic's Program." 1864*

But this demagogic madness has brought about the complete destruction of art. The mob has destroyed it by seizing it for its own—for art is strictly reserved for exceptional natures and, moreover, demands a sensitivity, gifts, and a knowledge which can never be within reach of everyone.

Now everything is finished and for a long time to come. Yet art no longer needs to be discovered. Its language has been completely developed, and it is only necessary to find it again, and to learn how to use it, each man according to his own temperament.

LOUIS ANQUETIN: *Letter to Sir William Rothenstein (translated by the author)*

La peinture n'est pas bien difficile quand on ne sait pas—Mais quand on sait.... Oh! alors! C'est autre chose.[1]

DEGAS (*quoted by Paul Valéry*)

Sommo danno è quando l'openione avanza l'opera.[2]

LEONARDO DA VINCI

[1] Painting is not very difficult when you don't know how—but when you know, ah! then, it is a different matter.

[2] The supreme tragedy is when theory outstrips performance.

There are many writers on our art who, not being of the profession and consequently not knowing what can or cannot be done, have been very liberal of absurd praises in their descriptions of favorite works. They always find in them what they are resolved to find.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS: *Discourses*

THE GREAT TECHNICAL TRADITIONS of painting, seriously weakened during the nineteenth century, were almost entirely dissipated in the first quarter of the twentieth. Two factors were chiefly responsible for the deterioration of standards which made such a breakdown possible: the conflicting and mutually exclusive aims and methods of the painters, and the deplorable teaching systems which came into general use around the nineties.

The disintegration due to these causes was greatly accelerated by the steadily increasing influence of critics, art experts, and amateurs—of persons, that is, who did not paint at all or who painted incompetently. These groups were essentially products of the nineteenth century. Although art criticism is probably as old as art itself, before the development of journalism and periodicals the professional art critic was a relatively sporadic figure. The art expert entered the scene even later, an outgrowth of the art museum, itself a nineteenth-century institution. And, while incompetent and bungling painters have always been more plentiful than able and learned ones, until recently their opinions on matters of art were given little consideration. The severe discipline of the apprentice system eliminated most of the untalented pupils during their student days, while the strict rules of the painters' guilds and, later, of the academies made the practice of painting almost impossible for a painter unable to meet the standard requirements of his profession. But, in the revolutionary and anti-authoritarian Europe following 1830 and 1848, more and more art students saw fit to continue their efforts at painting, ignoring the discouragement of their teachers and the indifference of the public. When a few of these unpromising beginners subsequently turned into painters of genuine distinction the unsuccessful artist began to acquire prestige. There was always the possibility that even the ugliest duckling might grow into a swan.

Throughout the five preceding centuries standards of workmanship in painting had been maintained, on the one hand, by master craftsmen who set the seal of their approval on work well done and, on the other hand, by the patrons who "knew nothing about art" but insisted on getting satisfaction from what they paid for. Though their judgments were founded on very different criteria, the former on expert technical knowledge and practical experience, the latter on plain horse sense, it is notable that the two parties rather frequently found themselves in substantial agreement as to what was a successful picture. And so, for that matter, do they still today.

In the nineteenth century, another standard came into being, created by the

opinions and theories of persons specializing in the art of painting without having mastered its craft. The critics and the art experts necessarily formulated their theories and opinions without benefit of faculties trained by the discipline and practice of painting, and their ideas of how pictures should be painted were not based on practical experience of trial and error in the studio. The opinions of the amateurs, on the other hand, were, at best, the product of a fragmentary and one-sided technical development and were put forward by persons who, through their very failure to learn how to paint well, had demonstrated a certain lack of perception in matters of art. All three groups differed from the general public in that they had ceased to rely on their instinctive reactions of liking or disliking, when confronted with a painting, but tried to estimate its merit according to self-consciously elaborated esthetic principles. They differed from the craftsmen in that they had not proved the validity of their ideas by applying them effectively in the making of pictures. They differed from the genuine scholars and historians of painting in that they considered themselves qualified to influence and guide the course of contemporary painting and to indoctrinate the general public with their own preferences and tastes.

The nineteenth century also witnessed a remarkable increase in scholarship devoted to exploring the history and archaeology of painting. Modern methods of research were applied to the arts and resulted in a better understanding of the historical development of painting. Great advances were made in the science of attribution, and new light was thrown on the relation of individual painters to their fellow artists and to the society in which they lived. These extremely valuable investigations are being carried on today and will continue to bear fruit. The scholars devoting themselves to this work should not be thought of as belonging to the groups under discussion here. Neither should the museum curators who confine their activities to the arduous task of administering the galleries under their charge and to co-ordinating the various points of view necessary to the formation of a representative collection and who provide the vast sum of erudition without which paintings cannot be properly evaluated or adequately presented to the public.

The emergence of these new groups mentioned above proved to be an event of major importance in the history of art. For better or for worse, they completely altered the character and trend of painting. Artistic drones and unskilled artists multiplied throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century and replenished the earth in the twentieth. For the past fifteen years or so they have had complete control of nearly all the activities connected with painting carried on in this country. They are the museum curators who decide what contemporary paintings shall be bought with the money entrusted to their charge. They are the lecturers, sponsored by the museums, who teach visitors "how to look at pictures." They are the writers whose articles instruct the public on what they should and should not like. They are the teachers who, in accordance with a recent educational fad, indoctrinate the children of our public

schools with the proper esthetic attitudes. And, strangest of all, they are the artists who for some years past have constituted a majority on juries, committees, and associations supposedly made up of professional painters.

A few years ago an art critic, justifiably shocked by some awards made by a jury of very prominent artists, wrote that by their action they had disproved Whistler's statement that only painters were qualified to judge paintings. The critic either did not realize, or was too courteous to say, that not one of the men serving on that jury would have been considered a painter by Whistler, or by Whistler's professional colleagues. Not one of them could paint well enough to achieve professional standing, judged by nineteenth-century standards. In Whistler's time a painter was a man who had learned a very difficult trade and practiced it with skill and integrity. The cowl does not make the monk. Manipulating pigments and brushes does not necessarily make a man a painter or qualify him to render a painter's judgments.

Nearly all these people are sincere, many of them to the point of fanaticism. Most of them care intensely about painting, or their particular concept of what painting should be. We cannot say with certainty that some of their guesses will not prove to have been sound or even that, on occasion, their instinct may not have sensed the import of a work of art which escaped the specialized judgments of trained painters. But it was formerly accepted as a truism that the general merit of a picture could be at least approximately established by the application of standards of workmanship more substantial than opinions based on guesses, instinct, and personal likes and dislikes. It was also recognized that only persons themselves highly skilled in the art of painting were qualified to apply these standards. However one may feel about this proposition, it is important to recognize that the enthusiasts of the new order are in no effective sense trained picturemakers and that they are therefore incapable of giving the kind of judgment on painting formerly expected of professional painters.

In painting, esthetic perception and the ability to execute develop almost simultaneously, the one only slightly in advance of the other. For instance, as a painter learns to perceive shapes correctly he acquires the ability to render them correctly on paper or canvas. At about the same time he becomes aware of the degree and quality of the correctness of the shapes made by other painters and realizes how imperceptible these differences had previously been to him. As he grows sensitive to the meaning implicit in the contour of the human form, his line will become meaningful and expressive to the extent of his sensitivity. At the same time, and not before, he will begin to perceive just wherein lies the immense superiority of the line of a Michelangelo or a Leonardo, of an Ingres or a Degas. A student's progress seems to him like the falling of successive scales from his eyes. For some this process is quite rapid, for others slow. For the untalented it stops early or does not occur at all. It is, in fact, only after his eyes have acquired a fairly high degree of sensitivity, which is to say, when he can paint fairly well, that a student realizes the overwhelming difficulty of painting. To the untrained and the untalented it does not seem very hard. This explains the

naïve contentment which so many thousands nowadays derive from putting paint on canvas. It also explains the enthusiasm which their daubs kindle in certain breasts.

Now the perception of esthetic values resulting from working experience and manifest in the work of its possessor is a very different thing from the auto-suggested emotions many people work up in front of a famous painting and mistake for appreciation. Any enjoyment derived from pictures is all to the good, of course, as far as the picture lover is concerned. But, however sincere and genuine it may be, enjoyment is not necessarily a proof of the picture's merit. In fact, it is extremely easy to read into a painting the emotional elements one has been told are there. This accounts for the spell cast for a time by certain pictures which often seems inexplicable to later generations. The supposed portrait of Beatrice Cenci by Guido Reni was such a painting, which, having moved our great-grandmothers to tears, appears today a quite well-painted studio head, no more and no less. One might hazard that some dramatized canvases of Van Gogh's will similarly lose their interest. The great literary gifts of a Ruskin may impose a writer's personal reactions on two or three generations. But in most cases these emotional auras fade in a decade or two. Only when an artist's emotions are projected through pictorial qualities of a very high order do they continue to stir the hearts of successive generations of men and women.

The shift of authority in matters pertaining to painting from accomplished practitioners to nonpainters and to artists having only a tiny fraction of the skills formerly considered essential has established the trend of contemporary painting. Most of the characteristics enumerated in the last chapter as peculiar to the painting of our time are a direct result of this shift. Many people have hailed the change as removing an artificial and pernicious curb on the free expression of individuality and personal feeling. Others have seen in it a lethal blow to the very principle of technical discipline and objectivity, without which ideas and emotions cannot be welded into viable works of art. The dispute is likely to continue for many years. It will be decided by the final estimate which posterity sets on the kind of painting being done today and on the painting which develops out of it.

Some of us feel that the influx of fresh ideas and experimental approaches emanating from these nonprofessional sources might have been beneficial had the amateurs and theorists been counterbalanced by a strong body of soundly trained painters, capable of absorbing and utilizing whatever was pictorially valid in the new without losing the accumulated lore of the past. Unfortunately the painters were already divided against themselves and had ceased to transmit the necessary knowledge and skills to the potential painters of the younger generations. With only a dwindling and unorganized handful to oppose them, the nonprofessional groups were able to impose their tastes and standards and their conception of the nature of painting. Writers and lecturers made up the most influential group, men of a predominatingly literary culture, who inevitably interpreted painting in terms of literary values. The largest group numerically were the so-called "advanced" artists, most of whom had not mas-

tered even the rudiments of their art, and who unwittingly made artistic virtues of all the solecisms and distortions characteristic of amateurs and beginners the world over. A large part of the public was delighted to find painting at once so easy to practice and so charged with emotional and mystical significance. Misplaced intellectualism imposed on ignorant execution is the guiding principle of painting today.

It is very doubtful whether the modern movement has produced anything in painting that will be of lasting value or interest. Will any pictures so lacking in the qualities common to the paintings which hitherto have been highly esteemed by several generations of men survive the cold appraisal of posterity? If they do it will be contrary to all historical precedent. The worth of what these would-be innovators have brought is still untested. Meanwhile they have destroyed the slowly evolved language of painting, thereby robbing talented artists for probably several generations to come of the means necessary for their effective self-expression. It will probably require the efforts of many successive individuals of extraordinary genius, extended over a long period of years, to reconstruct the body of complex knowledge which was so lightly thrown aside. That such a reconstruction will sooner or later be considered necessary is as certain as the coming of rain after a long drought. But it is impossible to say whether the reaction will take place tomorrow or in a hundred years.

When that time comes one thing should be clearly recognized. Useful information about the great painting traditions of the past five hundred years will not be obtained from the painters of the new dispensation. A new form of painting they may possibly have created, as they and their admirers believe. We cannot even say with certainty that it is not a great form. But we can say without reservations that, of the older art of painting, they know nothing. Their ignorance is manifest in every line they draw and every touch of paint they put on canvas. Consequently their estimates and analyses of the painters of the great European tradition can be dismissed as worthless by anyone genuinely interested in that tradition. The serious student will find the issues still further confused by the way the art of the last eighty years has lately been presented to the public by writers on art and by the museum authorities.

The years between 1860 and 1914 are those which will require the most careful scrutiny. During those years the traditional knowledge of painting, the slowly elaborated ways and means of transmuting elements of the visible world into pictures, the disciplines capable of developing latent talent and sharpening artistic sensibilities, the mental attitudes and intellectual approaches which set painters apart from men of other professions—in a word, the entire accumulated lore of the painter's art was allowed to fall into disuse, to become distorted and misunderstood, or to be completely forgotten. The broken strands of the fabric can best be brought to light and pieced together through the study of the work and ideas of the nineteenth-century painters, the last to practice their art with genuine mastery. They are nearer to us than the great masters of the seventeenth century, and consequently more accessible. And the catastrophe which followed in their wake should help us to analyze their weaknesses

and mistakes to our own profit. It is with the painting of this period that this book is chiefly concerned.

Now it is precisely the painting produced during those years that has been subjected to the most drastic revaluations by the leaders of current esthetic fashions. An uninstructed person who should compare a book on the painting of that period published around 1900 with one published in the nineteen-thirties would be completely bewildered. The two books hardly appear to deal with the same subject. The painters accorded the highest praise in one book are scarcely mentioned in the other. The gods of 1900 are the laughingstock of 1935, and vice versa. What is the reader to think?

Judging from past history it is certainly reasonable to assume that the painting of a period does not fall into its permanent position in the hierarchy of art for about a hundred years, that is, until some three generations have passed. On this basis it will be a good fifty years more before the art of the later nineteenth century will be assigned to something like its ultimate place. It is well to remember, for instance, that the beautiful art of the French eighteenth century, now so highly prized, was held in contempt for some sixty years after the French Revolution. No one can say now with any security what will be considered the important art of the fifty years preceding the First World War. There is no more justification for assuming, as most art experts do today, that the classics of the era will be Van Gogh, Cézanne, and Seurat than that they will be Alfred Stevens, Gérome, and Jean Paul Laurens, as the painters and the public of their own day believed. Judging by the pictures that have survived from earlier centuries one might even surmise that the latter trio had the better chance. We cannot know. It is certainly absurd to dismiss as negligible painters, very highly esteemed in their day, whose pictures manifest to a high degree the qualities common to the great painting of the preceding centuries. The case against the traditional masters of the later nineteenth century would be stronger had the reversal of judgment from which they now suffer been made by painters who surpassed them in accomplishment, or even by their peers. This is far from being the case. The new values have been imposed on a puzzled but credulous public by men not one of whom could execute even the weakest passages to be found in the work of the painters who, sixty years ago, held the admiration of the civilized world. The reversal is based on a change of esthetic values which may or may not prove of lasting validity.

Art lovers today often forget that pictures were formerly painted to fulfill certain specified requirements, such as telling a story, recording the appearance of an individual, or enhancing the interior architecture of a building. Such things are only achieved effectively by the intelligent application of a vast amount of trained skill and acquired knowledge to the particular problem in hand. The pictures most successfully fulfilling these or similar requirements are the ones which were later rated as works of art. The working methods traceable in the pictures themselves, the surviving records, and the traditions of the studios, all indicate that the men who painted

these pictures were chiefly concerned with turning out good jobs. If any of them were consciously trying to produce "art," they held this as a secondary objective. The main concern was the job. If the job were sufficiently well done, in every respect, it would be, sooner or later, classed as art. But the painters knew that unless it was a good job it had no chance of being "art" at all and not much chance of being paid for. Painters learned to consider pictures in terms of good and bad jobs before even raising the question of their being good or bad art. And there is ample justification for this attitude. Fashions in taste and esthetics change continually, and with their flux pictures go in and out of fashion. But it is noteworthy that pictures which fulfill their purpose supremely well—in other words, the good jobs—have a way of coming back into favor again and again. The bad jobs disappear at the first shift of fashion and do not return.

That is why workmanship, in the fullest and broadest sense of the term, remains the persisting factor common to all the pictures which have been highly prized as works of art over long periods of time, regardless of when or where they were painted. Workmanship of a high order is the viaticum lacking which a picture will not get very far in its journey through the shifting fashions and fads which accompany the passing years. Of course, a picture may have such workmanship and still fall short of being a work of art. But, unless it displays purely pictorial qualities—and all these qualities come under the head of workmanship—having genuine intrinsic merit apart from their supposed intellectual or emotional content, a painting is invariably discarded as worthless before three or four generations have gone their way. The ability to recognize and evaluate such pictorial qualities and to judge them impersonally is acquired with the ability to paint pictures and, apparently, in no other way. By belittling this sort of trained judgment and subsequently eliminating it from their deliberations altogether the amateurs and art experts of our time have started the art of painting on an uncharted sea where it has drifted without pilot or rudder. The result is to be seen on the walls of our museums and picture galleries. It is labeled Modern Art.

The role which trained judgment plays in the healthy development of painting is of such paramount importance that it can hardly be overstressed. I shall return to the subject frequently in the course of these pages. It is singularly difficult to make clear to the layman the precise nature of the perception which a painter acquires simultaneously with his ability to execute. The nonpainter inclines, on general principles, to credit the painter with some special understanding about matters related to his profession, just as he gives similar credit to the surgeon, to the botanist, or to the plumber. But the third-rate painter and the amateur seem totally incapable of perceiving the factors on which painters endeavor to form impersonal judgments. It is, in fact, precisely the very lack of this perception which keeps them third-rate painters or amateurs. To the painter who has acquired it, this specialized perception becomes the mark of his profession which he instantly recognizes in a colleague and which

creates a common bond outweighing differences of taste or training, temperament or nationality.

On the other hand, it is easy to overestimate the sureness and scope of these professional estimates. Invaluable and indispensable in their place, it is important to realize their limitations, which the painters themselves are usually the first to admit and to proclaim. These judgments seek to be unbiased by personal taste or emotional reaction, although both taste and feeling are essential factors in the full appreciation of a work of art. So they are judgments which apply only to a limited but extremely important component. Like all other human judgments, they are by no means infallible. And, while people almost never show a valid critical perception of pictorial elements which they have not themselves mastered, it is not unusual to find competent painters who lack critical sense. But the effort of those in charge of museums and of art schools to run their institutions without the benefit of this trained judgment has resulted in tragic mistakes now plain to see. Perhaps the worst consequence has been that the pseudo training available to art students during the past twenty-five years has failed to develop this kind of critical faculty in our younger painters.

This is a painter's book about painting. It deals with painting rather than with art, on the assumption that art is most likely to be produced as a by-product of good painting. I have put all my emphasis on the opinions of painters, as I have found them recorded in books or heard them expressed by the painters themselves. I have attached special importance to what painters have said about the kinds of painting in which they themselves excelled. For fine pictures do not just happen. They are the result of careful thought and of profound knowledge intelligently applied to the solution of an artistic problem. But there are many types and sorts of painting, and proficiency in one type does not indicate understanding of the others. A painter is an authority, the best possible authority, on the elements of his art which he has mastered. For that reason a painter's opinions on painting should always be examined in relation to his own work.

The work of many of the nineteenth-century masters I shall discuss is not at present easily accessible to the public. Many of the painters, very famous a few years ago, will be completely unfamiliar to the reader. I mention them because they painted extremely well, and this is a book about painting. Thirty years ago their pictures were prominently hung in our museums and were admired by painters and public. Today they have been relegated to the cellars of those museums, when they have not been permanently disposed of by uninhibited curators.[1] This is, of course, very much to the advantage of the kind of painting fashionable today. It is nevertheless a great loss to the untutored public, who always have an incurable liking for well-painted pictures. It is a tragic loss for our potential painters, who have everything to learn from the pictures of these master craftsmen. It is precisely to the general public and to the potential painters of tomorrow that this book is addressed.

[1] E.g., Plates 62 and 63.

CHAPTER III

Representation as an Element in Painting

The painter will produce pictures of little merit if he takes the works of others as his standard; but if he will apply himself to learn from the objects of nature he will produce good results.

LEONARDO DA VINCI, *C. A. 141 r.b.*

If painting and sculpture come to an end it will be due to the trying to make bricks not only without straw but also without clay.

HENRY TONKS

In Paris, about the middle of the last century, conditions largely political in origin brought into sharp conflict two different interpretations of the art of painting, now called academic and impressionist respectively. Between them, the leading painters of the two schools retained a very large part of the knowledge of painting accumulated during the previous centuries. The approach of each school was the one best adapted to its particular objective, but, as these objectives were very different, the teaching of academicians and impressionists was established on divergent lines. The pupils interpreted the precepts of their masters as mutually contradictory, while writers and amateurs presented the two attitudes as antagonistic doctrines. Probably this would not have happened if the close contacts between master and pupils, characteristic of the older studios, had not been lost through the adoption of a new relationship which was to degenerate into the deplorable art-school system familiar in the twentieth century.

As a result, two methods which should have been understood as complementing one another were regarded as opposed. Each method represented an important part of the art of painting but was mistaken by its enthusiastic practitioners for the whole. Impressionist teaching, the more limited of the two in scope and in technical knowledge, but the one in harmony with the prevailing spirit of the times, succeeded in discrediting the academicians. But the teaching which impressionist painters substituted for that of their rivals was built upon too narrow a base to produce a really strong school of painting. Having repudiated many elements essential to a sound and durable tradition, because these elements seemed tainted with academism, impressionist teaching, especially as it was dispensed in the art schools, rapidly degenerated into a caricature of itself, responsible for a surprising number of the mannerisms and eccentricities, supposed to be characteristically "modern," monotonously familiar in contemporary work.

To trace the origin of these developments one must turn to nineteenth-century Paris. For nearly two hundred years France had led the western world in matters of art. Throughout the nineteenth century artists from all the countries of Europe, as well as from the United States, flocked to Paris to study. Some of them stayed on to work in France. More returned to their native countries and spread the ideas they had absorbed in the French capital. The influence of these ideas on the development of painting everywhere was enormous. Schools did exist independently, such as the pre-Raphaelite group in England and the Nazarenes in Rome and Munich. But their influence was limited, whereas the conflict of ideas which held the stage in Paris was rather closely paralleled in other capitals and art centers of Europe. Furthermore, most of the leading American painters who were teaching in the United States at the turn of the century had studied in France. The instruction given today in the majority of our art schools, in so far as it deals with representation at all, is derived from their teaching. Fragmentary, garbled, and distorted from its original meaning as this teaching has become, it still contains a nucleus of sound practice which the serious student could develop and utilize. He is not likely to succeed unless he gives careful study to the purposes and working methods on which the earlier teaching was based.

It would be unwise to embark on such a study, the main subject of this book, without first defining and limiting the kinds of painting with which it is concerned. I propose to deal only with painting in its traditional acceptation, painting, that is, which includes representation as one of its essential elements. This representation may be quite accurate and literal, or be summary and stylized. But, in the types of painting considered in this book, representation is a part of the pictorial scheme and the things represented are supposedly recognizable to an observer of average intelligence. Such painting is distinguished from those applied arts by which objects are adorned with nonrepresentational shapes whose function is to beautify the surfaces on which they are painted. It is also distinct from those other forms of painting, come to birth in recent years, which seek their effect through nonrepresentational means.

Many persons today believe this latter nonrepresentational art will be the painting of the future. Even if this proves to be the case it is inconceivable that the new form will displace representational painting. Should its future be the brilliant one its sponsors foresee, abstract painting might open the way to a form of art quite separate from traditional painting, and civilization would be the richer thereby. But the kind of painting which uses representation as a means to attain its ends will not be abandoned as long as civilized man endures. Some men will always be so deeply stirred by the pageant of the visible world that they will want to record their impressions in line and color. And there will always be persons for whom what Professor William James called "the mystery of fact, the wildness and the pang of life" will translate itself into mental images which they will feel impelled to project onto canvas. These will be the painters of representational pictures in the future as they have been in the

past. And, as in the past, they will have for audience the vast multitudes for whom such pictures are a joy and a solace with which they could not readily dispense.

The mysterious urge which drives certain individuals to devote their lives to painting pictures usually takes one of three forms. Either the artist is moved primarily by a desire to set down his impressions of what he sees about him, or he seeks to give visible shape to an ideal world of his own imagining, or he wishes to decorate with pictures surfaces forming part of a larger ensemble. Many fine pictures do, of course, accomplish all three of these objectives at once. But one of them invariably takes precedence over the other two, and the degree and type of representation utilized varies according to the purpose in the artist's mind. Of the three types, the painters fascinated by the aspects of the visible world give the greatest importance to representational elements, the decorative painters the least.

But, for all three, representation is the most effective means of expression at their disposal. Even if they would have it otherwise, the fact remains that, whenever representation is included at all, it inevitably becomes the predominating element in a picture. Anything recognizably "like" a familiar object immediately attracts and holds the attention of the spectator. This is clearly demonstrated by the way the eye is drawn to accidental figurations which occur in ornamental patterns. Once we have made out an old man's profile or a fish in a wallpaper design, it will no more down than Banquo's ghost. It follows that representation should either be scrupulously avoided or must be used in a way that contributes to the intended effect of a picture.

Therein lies the overwhelming importance to a painter of a sound basic training received in early life. Of all the procedures, devices, methods, and special abilities required by an artist to transform his initial conception into a picture likely to prove a viable work of art, the ability to represent the appearance of whatever he may select is the most important and the most difficult to acquire. This ability can, in fact, only be mastered by a person with an exceptional inborn aptitude for painting. But even a person so gifted will be able to set down the shapes and colors of things with accuracy and distinction only after a long training under a master himself proficient in the art. It has been abundantly proved that such a training is only effective during an artist's formative years. After his early twenties his perception of form ceases to be sufficiently educable. The great painters of the Renaissance and of the seventeenth century started their apprenticeships around fourteen or fifteen at the latest. I do not know of a case of a draftsman approaching the first rank whose training started later than eighteen. The errors and omissions of a painter's early training are irreparable.

During the early years of his training every art student makes misstatements of color and shape, passing successively from one kind of exaggeration to another, and it is the difficult task of a master to teach his pupil to recognize these errors and to correct them. The appearance in his work of various distortions and overstatements seems to be the unavoidable accompaniment of a young painter's development, and

these manifestations are as familiar in the art school as mumps and measles in the nursery. When a student's progress ends at an early stage the particular errors to which he is prone at the moment usually continue to recur in his work as mannerisms, if he goes on painting. And it is often noticeable that faults similar to his own seem to attract this kind of painter whenever he discovers them in the pictures of other men. It is somewhat as though a person should never recover from the attack of mumps he contracted as a child and throughout his adult life should be fascinated by swollen jowls, mistaking them for marks of distinction. The predilection of students and amateurs for work showing the defects of their own partially trained perceptions is familiar to everyone who has had occasion to see many would-be painters at close range. It is a trait which accounts for a great deal of the vogue which clumsy and grotesque representation enjoys today. No estimate of Modern Art is complete unless it takes some cognizance of this psychological peculiarity.

Another factor has contributed to making unconvincing pictorial representation acceptable to a large public. This is our steadily increasing familiarity with the arts of remote civilizations and the crafts of primitive peoples. The researches of archaeologists and the discoveries of travelers have brought us into contact with many cultures alien to the European tradition. A ramble about a museum or a casual glance through a single volume of photographic reproductions confronts the observer with a bewildering variety of pictorial languages evolved by peoples differing widely from each other in environment and development. Acquaintance with these exotic forms has unquestionably enlarged the scope of our esthetic understanding and has greatly influenced contemporary art. Museums and libraries have become vast repositories to which creative artists may go for inspiration and ideas, and these recently discovered treasures have done much to renovate our feeling for decorative color and design. But the availability of so many types and kinds of artistic expression and approaches to representation has not been without danger to students and amateurs. For, while it will always remain impossible for even the most highly trained and scholarly artist of today to penetrate fully the intention of men who lived and worked with an outlook completely different from our own, it is extremely easy to ape the superficial characteristics of these foreign idioms sufficiently well to impress persons who have little understanding of the originals. This kind of imitation is comparable to parroting the accent and intonation of a language without knowing its vocabulary or syntax. Eclecticism of this naïve sort has provided an escape for many students who find themselves manifestly incapable of using the pictorial language of the European tradition. An artist will benefit little from the study of alien forms of expression unless he has first mastered the language of his own race and time.

Théophile Gautier used to say of himself that he was a man for whom the visible world existed.[1] A painter is first of all a man for whom the visible world exists. For

[1] This famous phrase is recorded in the *Journal des Goncourt,* in the entry made for March 1, 1857. The great man of letters is reported to have said: *Critiques et louanges m'abîment et me louent sans com-*

him the visible world is so vivid and stirring a thing, is so charged with excitement and significance, that it will not let him rest but drives him to studying and translating its manifold phenomena. This is the very trait that sets the potential painter apart from other men. And a man so constituted would not question the supremacy of the natural world as a source of inspiration and an inexhaustible store of material for his art.

Some of the leading modern groups tell us it is no part of their purpose to render what they see or to copy elements of the visible world. If I understand their spokesmen correctly, these painters repudiate representation, calling it a mere imitation of superficial forms. Their aim is to create a "formal order" derived from the mind rather than from nature, and they envisage painting as a language of imaginative creation, not as "objective reporting." By such cerebrally conceived "formal orders" they would express the inner nature of things rather than their external appearance and convey the emotions aroused by an object without depicting the object itself.

These are certainly exalted objectives, and the language in which they are described makes a strong appeal to people who are only interested in painting when it is interpreted in terms of something else. It would be rash to prophesy that the aims of these artists will never be achieved by the methods they have adopted. Perhaps they will be. But up to the present time the pictures they have produced only serve to emphasize the discrepancy between their program and their execution. The fallacy in their theory as a painter's working hypothesis becomes painfully apparent whenever any object is recognizably portrayed in one of their canvases. For, as soon as a shape is understood to resemble a face or a cat or a mountain, the average observer inevitably becomes critical of the effectiveness of its representation. Genuinely effective portrayal of anything has only been achieved after long study of its appearance by men of exceptionally sensitive vision able to set down their impressions with highly skilled hands. Even a commonplace portrayal, that is to say, one which is persuasive to the average eye, requires considerable knowledge and skill. And the necessary knowledge is acquired only through the study of precisely those visual aspects of nature which these new painters take pride in ignoring. They apparently do not realize that the forms which they profess to draw from within their minds are simply fragmentary memories of just such visual aspects of external nature, memories too slight and incomplete to be effective as artistic material unless they are reinforced by observation and study. Regardless of whether the painters of these pictures stick exclusively to their cerebral inspiration or whether they take surreptitious glances at the world about them, at the work of other painters, or even at photographs, as many obviously do, the result is representation, no matter by what name they choose to call it; but it is representation so inadequate and so clumsy that it is often indistinguish-

prendre un mot de mon talent. Toute ma valeur, ils n'ont jamais parlé de cela, c'est que je suis un homme pour qui le monde visible existe." A complaint many a painter might have made ever since art criticism has existed!

able from the attempts at painting associated for centuries with beginners, amateurs, and "artistic" children. Only the twentieth century has seen fit to call such efforts either "modern" or "art."

A few years ago a discussion of the importance of representation as an element of painting would have seemed preposterous. The changed outlook is chiefly due to the groups previously referred to: the writers and the amateur fringe, men of a literary bias, or persons merely ineffective at anything they do, or workers in other fields who find in tubes and brushes relaxation from something they do well. They are eminently not people for whom the visible world very greatly matters. If they were, those who write about pictures would be able to detect the difference between a sensitive, intelligent, and controlled piece of painting and an ignorant and bungling performance. If they were, those who try to paint would have learned to paint tolerably well or would have given up their attempts. If they were, those who paint "on the side" would have acquired humility from so doing, instead of an overwhelming confidence in their judgment about "art." Painting has been invaded by persons for whom the aspects of the visible world have little significance. It is as though the musical profession were taken over by composers, executants, and critics who were tone deaf. Should such a situation occur, people for whom musical sounds are a source of overwhelming experience would doubtless pay scant attention to the opinions of the intruders and would bid them seek their emotional outlet in an art for which nature had given them greater understanding.

Representation is an integral element of painting, but the degree and the character of the representation used have varied according to the development of the art and the purpose of the artist. A detailed analysis of the relationship between these factors throughout the centuries would be out of place in this volume. We are here concerned with the decline of painting at the present time. That decline is largely a result of the conflict between different approaches to representation, the one favored by the nineteenth-century academic painters, the other by their impressionist contemporaries. The aims of the two groups were fundamentally different and the realization of those aims required substantially different technical approaches. The aims of both are among the constantly recurring aspirations of painters; the academicians endeavored to depict the world of the imagination, the impressionists to set down aspects of what they saw. Both groups gave us many fine pictures which will eventually take their permanent places in the art galleries of the world, from which they have lately been to a large extent excluded. But their immediate interest to the student of painting lies in their respective attitudes toward representation. In these attitudes the art student will find material of inestimable value for his development into a painter. And, in the conflict between those attitudes and the subsequent collapse of all standards of workmanship, the historian and the reader curious about Modern Art will discover the explanation of much that has been perpetrated in the name of painting during the last thirty years.

CHAPTER IV

The Academic Point of View

Ce que j'apelle "Le Grand Art" c'est simplement l'art qui éxige que toutes les facultés *d'un homme s'y emploient et dont les œuvres sont telles que* toutes *les facultés d'un autre soient invoquées et se doivent intéresser à les comprendre.*[1]

PAUL VALÉRY: *Degas, Danse, Dessin*

A promiscuous use of the word academic is an outstanding characteristic of the art jargon of today. Applied to contemporary pictures the implication is almost always derogatory. It suggests that the user believes the picture so branded shows traces of school training and, for that very reason, is necessarily labored and uninteresting. There is justification, of course, for using the word "academic" to designate a typical product of an art school or academy. But the work done in art schools has not for many years been in the tradition which originally gave meaning to the word "academic." As a matter of fact, the art schools of the twentieth century, almost without exception, have tried to teach a debased form of impressionism, whenever they could be said to teach anything coherent. And this type of impressionist painting really developed in direct opposition to the academic painting of the last century. To call painting of such a kind "academic" necessarily leads to some confusion. But the confusion is enormously increased when the word "academic" is applied, as it so frequently is today, to very incompetently painted pictures happening to possess certain superficial characteristics which many critics apparently associate with the work of art-school graduates. The epithet "academic" certainly should at least indicate that a picture shows a sound craftsmanship, great learning, and a thoroughly trained competence on the part of its author, though it may also imply that it shows little else. But most of the pictures called academic today are neither competent, learned, nor well made, though their critics are seemingly unaware of the fact. This is, unfortunately, especially true of certain critics who appear anxious to support traditional painting on principle and who hail as "good work in the academic tradition" exceedingly stupid and clumsy painting. Indeed, one gathers that any signs of conscientious struggle, however abortive, any attempt at neat workmanship, however insensitive and unintelligent, or, perhaps, even any consideration of

[1] What I call Great Art is simply an art which enlists *all the faculties* of an artist and whose works demand for their understanding *all* the faculties of another.

light and dark values, however crudely stated, evokes the idea of academic painting in the minds of most critics.

So the art student of today is frequently confronted with the word "academic." In all likelihood the meaning which the word conveys to his mind is not at all clear, but, when it is applied to pictures or to a type of teaching, he realizes its implications to be disparaging. It probably suggests to him drily and conscientiously painted pictures of literary subjects, dull in color and meager in technique. Academic teaching he is liable to think of as something infinitely tedious to follow and involving a great waste of labor on the part of the student, but quite sterile in its results. This teaching calls to his mind such happily discarded futilities as drawing from the antique, carefully studied light and shade, accurate outlines and anatomy. If the art student is of a scholarly turn of mind and is sufficiently interested in the subject to look into the matter further, there is a good chance that he will trace the sources of this teaching tradition, as well as these tiresome pictures, back to a group of French nineteenth-century painters who were themselves known as the academic painters of that era. But it is not likely that he will be very familiar with the work of this group of men, or even with their names. He may remember reading of them that, though they were rated very highly in their day, they have now been judged by a more enlightened criticism to be quite negligible.

If he gets that far he will have reached a point where it will be very much to his advantage to attempt on his own account a reconsideration of these French painters, and especially of their technical equipment. For that technical equipment, the last and perhaps the completest flowering of the real academic tradition, happened to be extraordinarily broad. It is not too much to say that the leaders of this group possessed a body of knowledge needful to the making of pictures equal to any in the hands of any painter, or group of painters, since the seventeenth century. The greater part of this knowledge would be of immense value to a talented artist today if he could only acquire it and apply it to his own purposes. He will hardly succeed in so doing unless he has understood the esthetic aims to which this technical knowledge was applied. A brief outline of the origin and development of the academic tradition may be helpful.[1]

The tradition crystallized and acquired its name in the second half of the sixteenth century. At that time, in several of the larger Italian centers, men eminent in the fields of learning, of science, or of the arts, formed associations which they called academies. These academies were primarily assemblies of honor, much as the Académie Française is today, and their avowed purpose was to meet for the discussion and promotion of the particular branch of learning to which they were dedicated.

[1] The following description of the growth of academies of art is necessarily oversimplified and summary. The reader wishing further information is referred to an exhaustive and scholarly book recently published: *Academies of Art, Past and Present,* by Nikolaus Pevsner, Cambridge University Press, 1940.

As we are solely concerned here with academies of art, it is to those only that I shall refer when I use the word "academy" in these pages. The first of them was founded in Florence by Vasari in 1563, although associations not very dissimilar had existed in other localities.

The rapid growth and development of these academies was a remarkable indication of the temper of the times. Several generations had passed since the rediscovery of Greek and Roman culture had brought a prodigious new life to Italian painting. The new ideas had now been pretty much worked out. Men of surpassing genius had carried various forms of painting to points beyond which it did not seem possible to go. They had left the mighty examples of their works and the memory of their brilliant personalities, and these served chiefly to dazzle and inhibit the men of lesser talent who succeeded them. Furthermore, the Renaissance had created, in all lines, a critical spirit which, as the creative impulse waned, tended more and more to dominate the fine arts. Men sought to establish esthetic canons, to deduce from the great art of the immediate past and of classical antiquity rules of taste and of procedure that should guide them in the making of further art. It was for the discussion and formulation of such principles that the academies were chiefly intended to serve. Presently they added to their establishment schools in which the practice of art was taught to such pupils as might come seeking instruction.

At about the same period the three Caracci, Ludovico, the elder, and his two cousins, the brothers Agostino and Annibale, opened a school of art at Bologna which had a tremendous success and which, by its example, effected a transformation in the methods of teaching painting. Until then a pupil had acquired the knowledge of his craft by working in the studio of a master, first as an apprentice and subsequently as an assistant. This constant association with the master and frequent collaboration on his pictures gave the student an opportunity to absorb all of the older man's acquired knowledge and experience. Furthermore, as it was very much to the senior artist's advantage to have as many adequately trained assistants as possible, he undoubtedly gave his best efforts to the teaching of what he knew. However, the essential part of this system lay in the fact that he taught by example and by the constant demonstration, through his own work, of the precepts and methods that he sought to impart. The history of five hundred years of painting gives abundant proof that this method has produced more thoroughly trained painters than any other hitherto tried.

Now the school at Bologna was worked on a different basis. It was not a studio or a workshop, but an institution where instruction was given in the art of painting. Ludovico Caracci would seem to have been the general director. Annibale criticized the drawing and painting. Agostino gave courses in perspective, light and shade, and anatomy. Distinguished outsiders lectured on history, on literature, on the theory of art. And there were competitions, awards, and prizes. In short, the prototype of the

art school was established once and for all. And, as the various academies eventually opened schools of their own, it was along the lines of this Bolognese institution that they constructed them. Inevitably, these academic schools were even more impersonal in their management. The expenses were defrayed by the academy. The teaching usually was carried on by the various academicians in rotation. The academy school, therefore, really was an institution run by an institution.

The social conditions of Italy were at the time undergoing a transformation. The small independent states of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were being merged, mainly into five larger ones which survived after the treaty of Cambrai (1529), under the Spanish hegemony. It was a time when potentates and rulers sought to give dignity to their position by whatever means they found available. The brilliance that had been achieved by the little courts of the earlier Renaissance was no longer within their reach. The new morality forbade such a lighthearted pursuit of beauty and pleasure as had been theirs. It was characteristic of the times that the new courts sought to acquire a mild luster by patronizing the academies growing up at their doors. And it was, and remained, characteristic of academies to seek and to be dependent upon the patronage of the head of the states in which they were established. The association of academic art with the state is an important factor in the development of the former. From this association it derived the power and the financial backing which contributed to the longevity of the academic schools and of the traditions they taught. On the other hand, this very power made it possible for certain cliques to exert a despotic and stifling influence on the art of their times. The arrogant and narrow rule which they not infrequently imposed could not fail to produce a strong movement of revolt on the part of independently minded artists. Furthermore, when a government became politically discredited, the art connected with that government shared in its discredit. The official position of academic art has been both a strength and a weakness.

It will be seen that, from their very inception, these academies of art possessed the chief traits which we still connect with academic art. We find there that preference for a learned and eclectic ideal of painting which so easily becomes frigid and pedantic. We find firmly established the institutional method of art teaching, which at no time has ever produced results comparable to those achieved by the painter-apprentice system and which, finally, was to degenerate into the art school of the twentieth century. And we find that dependence upon state or community support which was to give such remarkable longevity and strength to the academic system and to the methods, good and bad, that it has stood for.

These elements were all to be found in the Italian academies of around 1600, but it was the French Academy (founded in 1648) that was destined to amplify them and impose them on France and on the world. Colbert perceived how much a brilliant academy of fine arts could add to the prestige of France. He and Louis XIV

were fortunate in having in LeBrun the ideal founder of a great institution of this sort; and LeBrun was fortunate in having a monarch who required his particular talents and who was ready to use them on a magnificent scale. LeBrun, through his own studies in Italy and through the influence of Poussin, was thoroughly imbued with the Italian academic tradition. So, in organizing the Académie Royale de Peinture, he followed the lines established by the schools of central Italy. The influence of this academy was enormous. French art was to dominate in the western world for two centuries and a half. And all through that time the academic tradition persisted, now stronger, now weaker, but virtually unchanged in its main lines. And so it came about that a French student in 1890, trying for the highest award available, the Prix de Rome, found himself painting a picture along principles and lines that might have been laid down by Nicolas Poussin, painting in Rome in the year 1640.

The essential trait of the academic attitude lay in the pre-eminence which it gave to what was usually called historical painting, though it was also called, and with better reason, "poetical painting." This sort of painting set out to illustrate narratives presenting man in his heroic aspects, choosing by preference incidents typifying the ever recurring patterns that govern human conduct from age to age. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these subjects were generally taken from the Bible, from the literature of Greece and Rome, or from allegory. Throughout that time the reverence for this type of painting was almost universal. It was held to be the highest form of painting, and many distinguished artists whose gifts manifestly lay in other directions lamented all their lives that they could not achieve eminence in "the higher walks of art." In the nineteenth century the subject matter was broadened to include the literature of other lands and epochs; but the superiority of painting with this sort of a literary background was still believed in by most of the leading painters of the first half of that century and by a dwindling minority of them in the second half. With the twentieth century, historical painting, so-called, has become definitely outmoded. Usually held up as an object of ridicule, it is hardly ever attempted by the artists of today.

It should seem to us absurd to rate any one type of painting as of itself superior to another type. Great painting is the result of two factors. The first essential is that the painter should be expressing his own genuine emotional reactions in a form which is the appropriate vehicle for that expression. The second factor is that he should be a master of that form. In other words, it is of vital importance that the artist should care intensely about the kind of painting which he practices and that he should practice it with sufficient knowledge and skill. One man will be stirred by the flow of light over the varied textures of a still life, another will be fascinated by the changing lines of faces, while a third will be thrilled at the imagery evoked by a reading of the sagas. All we can ask of each of these, as of many other types of painters, is that each shall find a pictorial form adequate to communicate his own personal emotion

to the world. It should seem folly to set up any one of these pictorial forms as in itself superior to the others and to demand that all artists should adopt it for their mature work, however valuable the practice of forms alien to the worker may be as a means of training. It should seem to be folly, and most people today would agree in conversation that it was so. Yet it is remarkable how persistent is the desire to set up a prevailing fashion in painting as the standard form of that art which should be practiced by all, on pain of being ignored. This is done chiefly by the outer fringes of the art world, the critics, the amateurs, and the museum curators, but it is also done distressingly often by the painters themselves. I have just mentioned the long predominance of the academic ideal. As we shall see, it was to be followed by the shorter, but equally intolerant, reign of the impressionist viewpoint. And even in the period of artistic anarchy preceding the Second World War there was a strong tendency in America, on the part of what I have called the outer fringe, to insist on the supremacy of a certain type of subject matter momentarily called "the American Scene" or of pictures supposed to register "social consciousness." There is, of course, nothing artistically right or wrong about this subject matter either. Future generations will judge the pictures based upon it according to their artistic merit, regardless of their subject. Unfortunately this school of painting has hitherto produced little which rises above social caricature, and, for the most part, third-rate social caricature at that.

The scorn in which historical painting is at present held undoubtedly represents a natural reaction against the high esteem in which it had so long been kept. But when a form of art has been rated as highly over so considerable a period, it is very unwise for an artist to dismiss it summarily. And if we look into the matter more closely we find, as we had a right to expect, that this historical painting does correspond to a fairly constant, and apparently fundamental, aspiration of the mind. This aspiration is the yearning to recreate, by means of art, an imaginary world removed from the actuality of contemporary life, a world of which the elements are sufficiently familiar to be recognizable and yet are in some way changed and ennobled, so as to suggest that finer, lordlier existence of which most of us at moments feel capable, but which in reality we never achieve. It seems to be a deeply rooted characteristic of the human mind to situate this world of the imagination in the past. Men have always dreamed of a golden age when gods and heroes walked the earth and mingled with mortals like themselves. This activity of the mind, which contributes to making the mythologies of primitive races and which, in a later stage of civilization, gives birth to epics and sagas, is one of the most universal, as well as one of the most productive, manifestations of the creative imagination.

The painter who aspires to represent that nobler world of the imagination to which man turns to escape the triviality and pain of everyday existence is faced with the problem of finding a subject matter which immediately arouses a response in the

mind of the average person in his audience and, at the same time, one susceptible of being a vehicle for his own individual expression. The Bible and the literatures of Greece and Rome were sufficiently familiar to the cultivated public of Europe during the centuries following the Renaissance to provide subjects fulfilling the first of these requirements. The very remoteness in time and place of these stories made it possible to treat them with considerable latitude of invention without shocking common sense. Furthermore, the pseudoclassical costume, which had become a part of the academic tradition, was again remarkably adapted for individual treatment. It gave ample opportunities for introducing parts of the nude figure, which has nearly always been the artist's most eloquent means of expression, while the simple folds of the draperies themselves contributed a further element of expressiveness and monumental effect. The narratives contained in these literatures are certainly among the most stirring that we possess. To estimate the pictorial value of this subject matter we have but to compare it with the incidents of more recent history, which for a time were in vogue in the nineteenth century. By their very nature these latter suggested an overabundance of archaeological detail and local color. The effort to treat these subjects with historical accuracy often resulted in pictures cluttered with bric-a-brac and trivial detail. The more he considers the problem, the more the painter who is looking for a subject matter that will give scope to his imagination realizes the extraordinary possibilities of so-called historical painting. He will soon cease to be surprised that it had so great an appeal to generations of artists and their publics.

Throughout the centuries the painters who were absorbed by this objective have felt it could best be achieved by means of a quite complete representation. That is to say, they sought to depict the incident in hand with sufficient verisimilitude to obviate any possibility of the spectator's being puzzled or irritated by the manner of the rendering. When they failed to achieve this difficult ideal it was because they were inadequate to their task. It is only of recent years that the necessity of so high a degree of representation would even have been questioned. What I wish to point out is that this necessity can only be correctly evaluated if it is considered in relation to the object in view, which, in this type of painting, is the forceful presentation of an incident that has a deep significance to humanity. It is certainly true that many academic painters elected to illustrate trivial anecdotes, the triviality of which is emphasized rather than concealed by their classical appurtenances. But this is one of the characteristics of academism at its worst. It was inevitable in periods when fashion led many men to attempt a so-called grand style for which they had no natural bent or inclination. First-rate academic art always conveys a sense of the high import of its subject matter. The significance of such subjects as the Entombment of Christ, Moses before Pharaoh, or the Sacrifice of Iphigenia is self-evident. The painter whose imagination is really stirred by a subject of this type will seek to paint it in such a way that the spectator will be gripped by its tragic intensity, its solemn grandeur, or its sym-

bolic implications. This effect will be destroyed if the spectator's attention is attracted by any very obvious peculiarities of handling, even if these are technical dexterities which in another type of picture might contribute an additional charm. It does not follow that this need result in poverty of execution. It has, however, been a part of the academic intention to make workmanship unobtrusive by its very perfection. And, in point of fact, the best painters in this tradition have given us some of the finest examples that we have of perfect execution. Their unobtrusive perfection, a logical component of what they were aiming at, has been greatly derided by painters whose talent made them unsympathetic to those aims. This misdirected derision has subsequently been amplified and used to discredit beautiful execution in general so that, in the minds of many, fine workmanship has become synonymous with smugness and painstaking stupidity. At the present time any semblance of neatness in the application of pigment may cause a picture to be contemptuously dismissed as academic. To any one who has tried to emulate the workmanship of the great academic painters such an appraisal will seem strange indeed. For workmanship of that quality can only be produced by a hand which is directed by exceptional faculties in a high state of tension.

"Je n'ai jamais rien négligé," is a remark attributed both to Poussin and to Ingres. The proud boast might have been made with equal truth by several other great painters of the academic tradition. In these days when great painting is commonly supposed to be the spontaneous outburst of genius working at white heat, such an infinite capacity for taking pains may elicit little admiration. Nevertheless the complete realization of an enormously difficult objective should command the respect and serious attention of anyone aspiring to the profession of men who so perfectly achieved their purpose.

The academic tradition stemmed from Rome. The artist most revered was Raphael, the Raphael of the later Roman manner, of the frescoes and the cartoons. The Caracci and their followers were placed almost on a level with Raphael. The statues which had come down from Roman antiquity were taken as models. These influences all made for an emphasis upon form rather than color, and the academic tradition has always insisted upon draftsmanship. The artists they set up as standards and the type of picture they aimed to produce led the academic painters to stress the drawing of generalized types rather than seizing the exact character of the particular model. As long as this was a matter of emphasis only, and while both kinds of drawing were insisted upon, it produced admirable results, and the virtual disappearance of any ability to draw a human figure of ideal beauty is a great loss even to those artists who would not care to utilize it in their mature work. On the other hand, when exact reproduction was neglected, as happened at certain periods, a type of drawing by formula developed which is one of the evils most justly held against academism. Sir Joshua Reynolds tells us that he visited certain continental academies in which the

students were taught to reproduce, as it appeared in nature, only the pose of the model. Proportions, structure, and character were arrived at by the application of rules and canons of taste. When drawing is correctly called academic in the derogatory sense, it is that sort of drawing which is referred to. But even that kind of drawing must be the result of a vast amount of acquired knowledge skillfully applied in order to justify such an appellation. When this knowledge has been combined with an intensive study of the appearance of nature the result may be fine draftsmanship of a very high order. The drawing of David, Ingres, Jean Paul Laurens, Leighton, Bouguereau, Gérome, and Delaunay was of this sort and takes its place among the great achievements of the nineteenth century. It is perhaps the finest flower that has blossomed in the academic garden.

Together with drawing, the painters of historical pictures relied for their effect chiefly on composition. The composition favored by the academies had for its essential purpose a clear and dignified presentation of the incident to be depicted. It was above all an illustrative, or storytelling, composition, in contrast to a decorative composition. Whereas the decorator [1] often obtains his main effects by the use of a brilliantly patterned drapery or of other objects unessential to the subject, such as a flock of birds or some flower-laden bushes, the academic tradition demanded a concentration upon the central action of the figures. It insisted that the gestures and distribution of these figures be of itself sufficient to tell the story. Subsequently this composition could be ornamented by the addition of brilliant accessories, but accessories these must remain. And more often than not a severe simplicity was adhered to throughout.[2] Since the aim of historical painting has fallen into disrepute or been completely forgotten, this sort of composition has been treated with contempt. It is not the decorator's way of composing. But it was right for its own purpose. What is more, it provided an incomparable training. There is perhaps no one form of painting that makes greater demands on a student than the execution of such a composition, taxing all the resources both of his technical ability and of his general culture. It was sound wisdom that selected this type of picture as the test for the highest award that academism had in its bestowal, the French Prix de Rome. One has but to imagine what some of the best-known painters of today would make of such a competition to realize to what depths of ignorance of his trade the modern artist has fallen.

The part which composition and design play in painting is so much discussed and so little understood today that a digression at this point seems apposite. Composition, which, reduced to its simplest terms, is the agreeable and effective distribution of light and dark masses over a given area,[3] is the one common denominator found in all pictures, whenever and wherever executed, which have attained lasting recognition as works of art. Pictures in which these masses are awkwardly or inharmoniously estab-

[3] Plate 3.

[1] E.g., Plate 5.
[2] E.g., Plate 2, 6, and 7.

lished sooner or later have been rated as bad art and have only been saved from destruction or oblivion by virtue of their historical or archaeological interest or, very occasionally, because of the extraordinary virtuosity of their execution. The art of designing consists of endowing these masses with interesting and expressive silhouettes and patterns which further enhance the effectiveness of their distribution.[1] While the distribution of the light and dark masses in his pictures has been one of the chief concerns of every good painter, some great masters have paid little attention to their patterns. Rembrandt [2] is an outstanding example of such a composer, Goya a lesser. But a fine balance of masses, with or without the additional factor of design, is an essential part of all the painting which has been judged great over long periods of time, whether it be a Greek vase, or a Chinese screen, or a Velasquez portrait. For a painter to ignore or slight his composition is to court disaster before his picture is even started.

"Modern" painters, as well as their spokesmen and their promoters, lay great stress on the esthetic and expressive value of compositon, pattern, and design. While belittling, or wholly repudiating, representation as a factor in painting these articulate persons rarely fail to tell us that one of the outstanding characteristics of Modern Painting is its renewed emphasis on design. Reading the critics, one constantly gets the impression that design is the pearl of great price to buy which the Modernists sold all that they had.

Now the striking thing about an overwhelming majority of the painters classified as "modern" is their marked inability to make a coherent or unified design of any carrying power or effectiveness, not to mention distinction. Most "modern" painters betray not the slightest feeling for spotting their masses or for patterning their shapes nor any realization of how these things are achieved. Matisse, often cited as a master designer, is a conspicuous example of a painter whose entire *œuvre,* from the earliest to the latest "phase," reveals a startling lack of sensitiveness to any element of design. A small percentage of "moderns" do make an obvious effort towards creating a pattern but with lamentably ineffectual results. The much-touted Mexican muralists are conspicuous would-be designers in this category. By and large, the "modern" groups are even weaker, if possible, as designers than they are in the field of representation. In rendering lip service to design they are on comparatively safe ground, for the average man, quite capable of noting that an eye is placed an inch or two higher in a face than its partner, is as insensitive to the design of a picture as the average listener is to the musical structure of a symphony.

Some of their apologists tell us that the "moderns" have merely renovated the art of design, restoring modes which had fallen into disuse and had been superseded by the inferior designing favored by academicians. To quote from one of the leading representatives of modernism in this country:

[1] Plate 6.

[2] Plate 4.

> Apart from the European periods mentioned—that is the sixth and seventh centuries B.C. in Greece, Coptic, Byzantine, early Gothic and Modernistic—where do we find this general trend in design? In most of the great so-called primitives: African, Polynesian, Eskimo, American Indian, Mayan and Peruvian, and in the drawings of any twelve-year-old child.[1]

The inclusion of the drawings of twelve-year-old children is especially arresting.

As with other disputed matters in the controversy between the traditional and the modern points of view, this issue will be decided only when contemporary painting has been subjected to the test of time. At this point one can only state opinions. But it has certainly not been made sufficiently clear to the general public that, in the opinion of painters trained in and practicing effectively the traditional forms of pictorial designing, the abstract patterns in the pictures of the average nineteenth-century academician are far more intelligently studied and are decoratively more effective than those turned out with so much fanfare by the "moderns." Their respective treatments of pattern can perhaps best be judged by juxtaposing black-and-white reproductions of each, upside down, thereby eliminating the distracting elements of execution and representation. Quite apart from the general run of academic compositions, several academic painters of the first rank managed to create some pictorial designs of very great distinction. Among these one might mention the "Stratonice" of Ingres or his "Vœu de Louis XIII"; Baudry's "Vision of St. Hubert"; some of Flandrin's compositions in St. Germain des Prés; Bouguereau's "Burial of a Martyr"[2] or his "Triumph of Bacchus"; Gérome's "The Cock-fight" or "The Augurs"; or a number of paintings by Jean Paul Laurens.[3] While at the moment we are considering these pictures for the pleasure to be derived from their patterns of light and dark, from the interplay of lines and masses and contrasting curves and verticals, it is well to remember that their painters used these patterns to increase the dramatic power of the pictures and created abstract designs without notably distorting the representational elements which they used so effectively.

The study of the sort of drawing and the sort of composition favored by the academic tradition necessitated, as a matter of course, a knowledge of anatomy and applied perspective as well as a very broad general culture. It is scarcely possible to embark on a historical picture without some knowledge of costume, of architecture, and of history. It would not seem possible to complete such a picture without having acquired the desire to know yet more. As centers of general culture the academies were superior to most of the studio workshops. But the student was only inclined to assimilate this culture as long as he perceived its intimate connection with his desire

[1] George Biddle, "The Victory and Defeat of Modernism," *Harper's*, June, 1943.

[2] Plate 7.

[3] Plates 9, 12, and 30.

to paint. By the beginning of the twentieth century the fashion in painting was wholly turned against making pictures requiring a cultural background. The art schools, heirs of the academic system, without having taken over its vast tradition of knowledge, hardly attempted to inculcate such a background. And few students ever felt cravings to acquire one, fortunately for the painters in charge, virtually none of whom had more than a smattering of general culture.

Color has usually been conceded to be the great weakness of academic painting. Before deciding whether this is a true charge, it is necessary to define the criterion by which we are judging color in pictures. We may have in mind either one of two things which are quite separate. We may mean taste in color, that is to say the ability to combine colors in a way that is beautiful, quite apart from what these colors represent. Or we may mean the ability to reproduce in paint the appearance of color as we see it in nature. Now taste in color is, perhaps more than any of the qualities that a painter may have, a natural gift, almost an instinct. It is very little helped or changed by schooling. So that academic training has probably had virtually no effect whatever in reducing the number of colorists of this sort. On the other hand, truthful and sensitive representation of the colored appearances of nature is an element of the art of painting which has rarely been stressed in academic teaching. The painter of historical pictures can never have before his eyes, as he is painting, the scene he seeks to represent. He is obliged to find his color by a formula, rather than by accurate transcription. Moreover, it is an integral part of his purpose that his picture should suggest a certain remoteness from every day life. He can achieve the necessary force and verisimilitude by making the form seem convincing, but a high degree of fidelity in the rendering of color may introduce a realism suggesting studio properties and posing models. The adoption of a formula for his color is one of the means by which he achieves his chosen effect. This formula in the treatment of color corresponds to idealization in the treatment of form. Both are essential parts of the academic painter's craft, but both tend to deteriorate into vicious systems when allowed to become too long separated from the study of nature. The teaching of the academies often allowed this separation to occur, but that was the fault of the teachers and the teaching method. Those who revolted against the academic tradition have ordinarily done it in the name of color. The impressionists of the nineteenth century failed to perceive that the color formulas of the academicians, in the hands of able men, were right and even necessary in their place.

Such, I think, are the characteristics of the academic tradition in painting. In recapitulation they are: first, the maintenance of the supremacy of a type of picture called "historical," though it would be more correctly termed "poetical"; secondly, and due to this preference, a severe training in drawing with, however, an emphasis on idealization which not infrequently became an artificial standardization of form taking the place of genuine observation; and, finally, great stress on certain principles

of composition. The later academies usually favored the technical methods derived from the Roman and Bolognese schools rather than the more subtle and elaborate methods of the Venetian and Flemish painters. And they usually sought to inculcate in their students a wide general culture. It must not be forgotten that it has been characteristic of academies to be sponsored and protected by the state, which has too often given certain deponents of the academic tradition a power and influence incommensurate with their artistic merit.

With these general notions in mind we can now turn to examine the course of academism in France in the nineteenth century. For it is that particular academism, an academism bearing the imprint of Louis David, which directly affected the painting of our immediate past.

CHAPTER V

The Academic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century France

Vrai d'abord, noble ensuite.[1]

LOUIS DAVID

Les arts sont l'imitation de la nature dans ce qu'elle a de plus beau et de plus parfait.[2]

LOUIS DAVID: *Speech before the Convention, quoted by Delécluze*

THE HOSTILITY and contempt of critical opinion for French academic painting in the last century has given place to a kind of silent treatment. Pictures of this school are rarely put on view and are scarcely mentioned by writers on art. And yet the few paintings accessible to the general public usually meet with immediate acclaim from persons who have not been "educated" by reading books on art or by attending cultural art courses. A fine Bouguereau shown in New York during the war was a source of revenue to the cause for which it was exhibited.[3] People stop before Gérome's "L'Eminence Grise" [4] whenever it is hung in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. When good examples of this kind of painting do appear their appeal is immediate. Yet we are told that they are not art, and they are not included at all in the exhibitions of nineteenth-century French painting which are given from time to time. To understand this widespread hostility to a school that was once accorded the highest praise one must understand its relation to French political history.

In the years immediately preceding the French Revolution the Académie Royale de Peinture demonstrated the defects of academism at its worst. In its teaching, the serious study of nature had been largely abandoned and formulas of exceptional emptiness had been substituted. Its taste was marked by artifice and triviality. And, in the administration of the Académie, evils, perhaps inevitable in an organization that was the appanage of a decadent despotism, had become apparent. For the Acad-

[1] Truth first, then nobility.
[2] Art is the imitation of nature at its most beautiful and most perfect.
[3] This picture "Nymphs and Satyr" (Plate 20) was exhibited at Durand-Ruel's galleries for the benefit of the Fighting French Relief Committee in 1943. With an admission charge of twenty-five cents the exhibition brought in $3,500.00 in less than three weeks.
[4] Plate 11.

émie was essentially an adjunct of royalty. In some respects this brought many advantages to its members. Academicians were the recipients of royal favor and enjoyed certain special privileges, such as the use of lodgings in the Louvre and the exclusive right to exhibit in the Salon, then held in that palace. To be an Academician was the only way in which the patronage of the great nobles and the rich bourgeoisie could be obtained. It was a period when a number of the powerful aristocrats took pleasure in considering themselves patrons of the arts. Inevitably those in power at court used their influence about matters which should have been decided by the Academicians alone, solely on artistic merits. Furthermore, Academicians were subject to certain annoying restrictions, such as not being able to travel, or to work abroad, without special permission from the King. The painters of merit within its ranks were openly dissatisfied with the Académie long before the outbreak of the Revolution.

After the overthrow of the monarchy the Académie Royale inevitably shared the odium connected with all that pertained to the old regime. In 1790 the malcontent Academicians formed a new society and elected David president. David had always hated the Académie. He had studied there and his having been several times passed over before being finally awarded the Prix de Rome probably added a personal grudge to his instinctive dislike of their teaching and their principles. He likened a pupil taught by the twelve professors instructing at the old Académie to a blind man led by twelve dogs. This simile might be pondered by the sponsors of our contemporary art schools. To his own pupils David was scathing in his denunciation of anything that savored of the teachings of the royal institution. And when, in the spring of 1790, he was notified that his turn had come to teach at the Académie he replied, with pompous curtness, *"Je fus autrefois de l'Académie,"* and signed, "David, *Député de la Convention Nationale*." Three years later, in his capacity of *député*, he requested and obtained the suppression of the Académie.

The twentieth-century student should remember that the academic teaching against which David inveighed differed in many respects from the teaching which the nineteenth century came to know as academic. I have pointed out that the tendency of the academic systems has always been to crystallize accepted methods of work into rigid formulas. Adherence to these formulas is apt to seem in itself a virtue to the more narrowly doctrinaire type of mind, any departure from them to seem a vice. David's diatribes at the *"métier"* taught at the Académie were directed against the formulas then in vogue [1] and their arbitrary application by the official instructors. It would be possible to use his words to discredit all acquired craftsmanship or systematic teaching in general, but David's own work and that of his many pupils stand as evidence that this would distort his meaning.

Many have felt that the prerevolutionary Académie would have transmitted a sounder craftsmanship than did David with his pretended reform. There is some-

[1] See Plate 15.

thing to be said in favor of this view as far as decorative painting is concerned. David's ignorance of the fundamental principles of decorative painting and his scorn for that sort of art had a disastrous effect on such of his pupils as might have had an aptitude in that direction. On the other hand there were no really thoroughly grounded decorative painters left in France after the Revolution to pass on the tradition. The aged Fragonard and the equally aged Hubert Robert were probably both too specialized in their own ways to adapt their teaching to a new architecture and a new taste. The other decorators of the time did little more than scatter cupids about over doors and chimney breasts.

But in the *"métier"* of easel pictures David was better versed than his contemporaries. The most competent of these was probably Greuze. The Metropolitan Museum gives us a remarkable opportunity to compare the workmanship of these two painters. David's "Death of Socrates" [1] is perhaps his best picture in the technique he derived from that of his eighteenth-century masters. It is easy to observe the transparent shadows, the monochrome preparation with cool gray half tones and the subsequent overlayings of translucent pigment. The method descends in direct line from that of Rubens. The Greuze [2] is worked out on the same principle, though in a warmer key. The point I wish to make is simply that David's is the more skillful and the sounder job. That David later chose to abandon this method and did not encourage his pupils to develop it is another story.

As his authority became firmly established, Napoleon sought to organize and encourage the fine arts, thereby to increase the brilliance of his reign. He and David had been acquainted for some years, the latter having frequented the house of General Bonaparte and of the First Consul. The Emperor recognized him as the leading painter of France, though he never gave him the superintendence of all the arts that LeBrun had exercised. Indeed, David's talents were too limited in scope for him to have held such a post to good effect. But this connection with Napoleon, whom he adored, served greatly to increase David's already tremendous authority in the world of art. The old Académie was not revived, but in its stead an honorary body was formed known as the Institut de France. First established in 1795, it was reorganized by an edict of Napoleon in 1803, which created a separate section representing the fine arts. Unlike the old Académie this body did not, as a group, give instruction in painting but exercised its influence through its rights to award the Prix de Rome and to judge the pictures sent back to Paris by the recipients of that honor in accordance with the established regulations. Until 1815 this association was completely dominated by David's personality and by his ideas.

With the Restoration, in 1815, and the exile of David, the Institut was again reorganized, this time into approximately its present form. The Section des Beaux Arts, originally consisting of eighteen artists, had been enlarged to twenty-four by

[1] Plate 16.

[2] Plate 17.

Napoleon and was now increased to thirty-four, of which fourteen were painters. At the same time an Ecole des Beaux Arts was established, at which only drawing was taught, the professors of which were appointed by the members of the Institut. These members also made up the jury that awarded the Salon prizes. Their influence was further enhanced by close contact with the new court and the fact that they received practically all the orders for decorations, portraits, and commemorative pictures emanating from the government. The painter-members of the Institut were all strongly imbued with the principles of David, and most of them had been his pupils. So it was that his particular form of Academism, and even an exaggeration of it, became entrenched in a position of exceptional authority.

With the accession of Louis Philippe, in 1830, the French monarchy lost much of its prestige and dignity, as a result of which the influence of the Institut was similarly diminished. But, under the new government, the Institut was given charge of the juries of admission to the Salons, which had formerly been controlled by the Direction du Musée. This once more increased their influence, as it made it possible for a little group of painters to decide which members of their profession should or should not be allowed to exhibit in public. Even today, when opportunities to exhibit are so numerous, the power of a jury of admission remains considerable and can do a great deal to hamper the career of a young painter. But, at the time we are considering, the annual Salon was almost the only opportunity that the average painter had to exhibit his work in Paris. That so complete a control of this opportunity should be in the hands of a small clique would at any time be unfortunate and inevitably result in violent hostility on the part of the painters they refused to admit. There is no denying that the men then controlling the Institut showed a narrowness of view in no way to their credit.

It is heartening to find that the really outstanding painters of the Institut group were not responsible for the excessive sectarianism of its juries. Delaroche, Horace Vernet, Drolling, Hersent, Ingres, and the sculptor David d'Angers at one time even withdrew from the jury and disclaimed responsibility for its acts. The less distinguished Abel de Pujol is also said to have left a jury in 1843 because it refused a picture by Couture.

The painters whom contemporary opinion held responsible for the intolerant attitude of the Institut were Granet, Bidault, Couder, and Blondel. The mediocrity of these painters was recognized at the time but, as their work is virtually unknown today, it is difficult for us to form an opinion of it. That the real leaders in the field of academic painting tried to dissociate themselves from these second-rate camp followers is too little understood today. The view has been generally accepted that narrowness of outlook is characteristic of the academic painter. In this instance, as in the case of David himself, a more careful study of the facts shows that it is often characteristic of the mediocrities trained in the academic tradition, or, indeed, in any tradi-

tion, rather than of painters whose talent, intelligence, and knowledge enabled them to achieve real eminence.[1]

The prejudice and arrogance of this body reached its highest point between the years 1841 and 1848. It is worth while considering the reasons for this. By that time the Institut, originally made up of men appointed by the government, had become entirely self-elected. It was only natural that the original group should fill the vacancies that occurred in their ranks by electing men working in their own tradition. While this would be quite justifiable in a private organization it was most unfortunate in an assembly supposed to represent the art of an entire nation. The small membership, fourteen painters, made a broad representation of this art very difficult, if not impossible. The very violence of the opposition engendered by their rule disposed them to close their ranks and to consider that painters with a different bias represented destructive elements which should be combated. This attitude on the part of those in power gave the painters of the opposing camps an aureole of martyrdom which was dramatized by the writers who took up their defense. Academic tradition in art became associated, in the minds of the younger painters and of a growing section of the public, with authoritarian government as well as with professional narrowness and prejudice.

Under Napoleon III various attempts were made to remedy a situation rapidly becoming a public scandal. In 1848 even a nonjury Salon had been tried, resulting in the ridiculous and bad exhibition that invariably emanates from this system. But the important changes in the organization of the fine arts under the Second Empire were made in 1863. The chief of these was the establishment of the Ecole des Beaux Arts as a school run by the state. The immediate purpose of this was to decrease the power of the Institut, which until then had charge of selecting the professors for that school. Moreover the curriculum of the Ecole, where previously only drawing had been taught,[2] was enlarged to include painting. As the tuition was free, this was a heavy blow to the private atelier system which for the preceding seventy years had given painters their training. These ateliers, in which the number of pupils was limited and the influence of the master powerfully felt, run by men who had a superb knowledge of their craft, turned out better trained painters than any other form of art-teaching has, excepting the apprentice system of the earlier days. The Ecole des Beaux Arts, directed and backed by the government, opened the way for a return to the worst evils of the teaching methods of the old academies. Flandrin, Robert Fleury, members of the Institut, and Muller, not a member, were asked to take charge of the school and refused. The work was undertaken by younger men, Gérome, Pils, and Cabanel.

[1] See "La Peinture sous la Monarchie de Juillet" by Léon Rosenthal, *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1910.

[2] My authority for this statement is L. Dimier, *History of French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. This book gives an excellent picture of what might be called the social history of French painting in the last century.

From then on the Ecole des Beaux Arts, rather than the Institut, represented official authority in art. Actually the Institut continued to exist and the faculty of the Beaux Arts were usually members of it. But the real power was now concentrated in the control of the Ecole. So also was most of the teaching. The private ateliers did continue in the hands of excellent painters into the twentieth century and produced some good pupils. But the authority of that kind of teaching was impaired. The day of the art school had arrived. However, the Ecole des Beaux Arts, while Gérome taught there, turned out well-trained men. One can only regret that so learned a painter should have wasted so much of his efforts teaching in an institution. The early years of the Ecole des Beaux Arts probably show institutional art teaching at its best. The art schools of the present day would presumably be examples of this sort of teaching at its worst. One cannot imagine a further deterioration. But all the defects that we see in the schools today were inherent in the system from the start.

The Ecole attained its greatest reputation about the late seventies. Pupils trained by Gérome, Cabanel, and Pils were then making their appearance on the scene. Gérome himself had acquired a prestige not unlike that first enjoyed by David and, subsequently, by Ingres. The evils inseparable from the school system had not yet become very evident. The academic tradition seemed to be personified by the Ecole. But this was also the period of the great battles of the impressionist movement. It was against the Ecole that the partisans of the new school launched their attacks, just as forty years earlier those defending the realism of Courbet had attacked the Institut. This time the opponents were more evenly matched. The public had become tired of the academic tradition. The onslaughts of the earlier writers had persuaded a large number that the painters in power were unfair in their conduct and prejudiced in their views. Some of the painters who had been persecuted a generation earlier had proved themselves to be of enduring interest. And the forces of the political left had grown. To these elements the art that was frowned upon by the government and their accredited painters represented liberalism. So in the vanguard literature of the period the Ecole des Beaux Arts and the tradition it represented are treated as scapegoats upon which are loaded all sorts of sins which have nothing to do with art at all. The odium still clings to the tradition. A student trying to evaluate that tradition on purely artistic grounds must make an effort to dissociate his critical faculties from prejudices having their origins in these extraneous circumstances.

The effect of David's reforms were far-reaching. His suppression of institutional teaching, one of his soundest contributions, established a better system which lasted for over half a century and was responsible for the fine craftsmanship of the leading French academic painters trained before 1864. His insistence on stern discipline in draftsmanship renovated and strengthened the plastic arts throughout Europe. Above all, and in spite of his predilection for the antique, David brought about a salutary return to the study of nature.

Because a number of his pupils exaggerated and distorted the principles of their master, David is often considered a symbol of misguided artistic pedantry. Fortunately we have a remarkable record of his actual teaching, preserved for us in a book on David by Delécluze: *Louis David, Son Ecole et son Temps,* Souvenirs par M.E.S. Delécluze, Paris, 1855. Any student interested in the subject should read this fascinating little volume, which gives a vivid picture of a great painter and a great teacher, working in a period that has many characteristics in common with our own. We find David advising one man to study Titian, Giorgione, and Tintoretto, as the masters most congenial to that student's particular talent. He warns another not to try to do the sort of painting for which he has no aptitude, to paint simple, familiar subjects, if his leaning is in that direction. To still another he says that it is better to paint well the subjects of Van Ostade or Teniers than historical pictures like those of Lairesse and Champaigne. And, always and without fail, he brings them back to the study of nature as the great source of knowledge and inspiration. In short, he tries to develop the artistic intelligence of each individual student, in conformity with his particular aptitude, through the study of nature and of the great masters, which at all times has been the essence of good teaching. We are forced to conclude that this man, whose political career was unfortunate and occasionally absurd, who voted the death of Louis XVI and loudly proclaimed his friendship first for Marat, then for Robespierre, and whose own pictures were too frequently manifestoes of successive doctrinaire enthusiasms, was an admirable teacher.

On the debit side it must be admitted that David's esthetic theories and the even narrower and ridiculous conceits of many of his pupils are of little interest today. They were responsible for some not very creditable pictures by the master himself and misled a number of his followers. Having no feeling for decorative painting he did not develop it in his students. As previously stated, David was also largely responsible for the rejection of the older technical methods of oil painting. He was perfectly familiar with some of these technical methods and utilized them skillfully in his early years. Even in later life he continued to use monochrome preparations and transparent shadows. But he affected to despise this side of craftsmanship and discouraged his pupils from using the old techniques. It was Ingres, however, who rejected them altogether and made a cult of opaque pigment. This latter method of direct painting was subsequently used and taught by painters working in the academic tradition. The best of these men applied it with extraordinary skill and in their hands it became an instrument admirably suited to their purposes. I have pointed out that unobtrusive perfection of workmanship was always an integral part of the academic tradition. Regrettable as it certainly is that the complex earlier techniques should have been lost, it is by no means certain that they would have been of use to the men of whom we are now speaking. The technical handling of Gérome, Bargue, Delaunay, Cabanel, Bouguereau, Jean Paul Laurens, and a number of others is as perfect of its kind as

anything in European painting. Perhaps no other kind of painting could have given the results they wanted.

David, then, brought about a return to the serious study of form which during the eighteenth century had fallen into neglect. As always in painting, this study of form was based upon the study of the human figure. David shared the view that the ideal canons of proportion for the human body had been established once for all by the sculptors of classical antiquity, an opinion with which it is difficult to disagree. But a reading of Delécluze's absorbing book should convince anyone that the master, in his teaching, gave a priority to the study of nature and directed his students to the classic models only as a means of educating their taste and observation. It is true that some of his own pupils and a host of minor followers did preach a servile imitation of antique statuary and lost sight of its relation to the study of nature. A reaction from this bad teaching was inevitable with the result that in some quarters Greek statues have been altogether discredited as objects of study for young artists. Another consequence of this reaction is the widespread contempt for anything reminiscent of classical beauty prevailing among the esthetically cultured today.

The low esteem in which the rendering of physical beauty is now held is one of the oddest peculiarities of recent esthetic fashion. One would suppose that the representation of the human form at its loveliest was a commendable artistic objective and one which, when successfully encompassed, could not fail to appeal to all sorts and conditions of men. Indeed, pictures of fair faces and finely proportioned bodies have always been more popular than any other sort and still are even today, except among the artistic *cognoscenti*. But in sophisticated circles the representation of physical beauty in a painting is of itself almost enough to bar it from serious consideration as a work of art. It is certainly true that human pulchritude, even well rendered, is not of itself sufficient to raise a picture to the dignity of art. But it has often been a factor contributing to the effect of a great painting, albeit a secondary factor. Many very great painters have devoted infinite pains to depicting their ideal of human loveliness in pictures which have been accepted as masterpieces for centuries. Until our own time the only objections raised against such pictures have been based on moral grounds, which certainly do not enter into the criticisms of the esthetes who condemn "prettiness" today. The modern attitude is an esthetic fashion like any other, although one singularly in conflict with normal human reactions, and, like all other such fashions, it will pass. It is a fashion responsible for our own present undervaluation of the nineteenth-century academic nudes; and, what is really unfortunate, it has entailed the loss of the knowledge required to paint the idealized human form.

The best so-called academic nudes were amazing achievements of their kind. The product of a profound study of the structure and shape of the human body and of a highly developed taste, they achieved a tremendous popularity. Their very popularity was perhaps enough to engender the contempt they now receive. Among the

knowing the nudes of Cabanel, Bouguereau,[1] or Leighton [2] provoke mirth and disgust. Here, too, the very different but equally valid attitude toward painting the nude adopted by the impressionist painters has been used to discredit the academic nudes. And, in estimating this fluctuation of taste, we must also remember that hatred is often begotten of failure. To paint a nude of ideal beauty which is completely convincing in structure and in modeling is one of the most difficult tasks in the painter's repertory. Very few have ever done it with complete success. Many have found it easier to justify their failures by proclaiming that ugliness, representing character, is of greater artistic value than ideal beauty. As a matter of fact both ways of treating the nude have, in the hands of masters, produced art. Who shall decide which represents the nobler form of art, Manet's "Olympia" [3] or the "Odalisque" [4] of Ingres?

It is very extraordinary that the kind of drawing evolved by the French academicians should lately have been so much derided and is now ignored. One would suppose that the exceptional faculties and the high degree of emotional tension which it requires and its consequent rarity would cause it to be greatly prized. Nothing quite like this drawing had been achieved before and only the very greatest draftsmen of the world have surpassed it in their own, doubtless greater, ways. At its best, this nineteenth-century drawing has qualities all its own. Examine, for instance, the portrait of his mother by Elie Delaunay.[5] There is no suggestion of idealization or of pretifying. The forms are stated simply, with an accuracy and an understanding that few painters have surpassed. At the same time, note the artist's awareness of how the particular shape in front of him now and again coincides with the typical, ever recurring forms of the human face. See how the eyes are set in their sockets, how the drawing of the lids suggests the ideal human eye while at no time attenuating the rendering of the eye belonging to that particular model. It is this double consciousness of the particular form and of the typical form that gives such drawing a quality which mere accuracy cannot approach. Or look at the drawing of the arms of the angel Jean Paul Laurens painted in the Panthéon.[6] Here also we have a correctness that is beyond criticism. But see how the line is studied to reveal the structure of the arm, how each accent, however imperceptible to the untrained eye, is calculated to emphasize the gesture and suggest superhuman power. Or again, look at the hands in a good Gérome [7] and note how the bones and tendons are subtly accented so as to give them expressiveness and distinction without any sacrifice of accuracy. These are random examples. The wonder is that the century produced many others. It is amazing enough that such things should be passed by today. It seems inevitable that they will be considered beyond price tomorrow.

[1] Plate 20.
[2] Plate 22.
[3] Plate 19.
[4] Plate 18.
[5] Plate 25.
[6] Plate 9. Because of postwar conditions it was not possible to obtain a completely satisfactory reproduction of the Laurens.
[7] Plate 23.

David did not compose very well nor did his pupils. Ingres was a marvelous designer but was less successful when he tried to handle groups of figures. In this respect the later academicians were superior to their immediate predecessors. Even this ability has also been denied them. In judging their work we must remember that it was a main part of their purpose to tell a story. This they often did supremely well by means of compositions beautifully and ingeniously patterned.

Nineteenth-century academic painters shared with their predecessors a predilection for literary subjects, but they broadened their repertory to include medieval as well as recent historical incidents and situations drawn from literatures other than that of the ancients. One of the characteristics of nineteenth-century academic painting is its use of costumes and accessories which were, as far as possible, archaeologically correct. It gives their pictures a flavor not found in similarly intentioned art of previous centuries. This archaeological preoccupation has also been freely ridiculed. Obviously archaeological correctness does not of itself increase the artistic merit of a painting. But two things should be borne in mind. First, in an era when the literate public is fairly well-informed about the general character of the costumes and the architecture of the past, anachronisms easily become absurdities. And, second, the local color of a past period offers the painter a wealth of material with which to compose his picture. Not to utilize this material is to throw away a pictorial element of genuine value. The nineteenth-century painters of the first rank often used the findings of archaeology with telling dramatic and decorative effect.

One would suppose that only the unimaginative could deny the tragic import of Delaunay's "Plague in Rome," [1] of the group before the door, and the cutting angular pattern made by the destroying angel. The fame of Laurens' "Excommunication of Robert the Good" [2] or his "Emperor Maximilian" [3] attest the force with which he has got his drama over to the public. The same is true of Bouguereau's "Burial of a Martyr" [4] or the "Eminence Grise" [5] of Gérome. A student may not like these pictures. He may not understand the desire to tell a story in painting, or to tell this type of story. But he should admit that the ability to do so has long been held an honorable part of the painter's profession and that these men possessed that ability to a supreme degree.

Lastly I would speak of the color of these academic pictures. I have had occasion to mention that color is usually held to have been the weakest point of the academic equipment and that it has most often been in the name of color that academic painting has been attacked. It is probably true that none of the painters of this school have been very great colorists, that none has achieved an outstanding beauty of color for its own sake. Once more, we must remember that they were interested in something else, in a thing which they believed could best be expressed by form and composition.

[1] Plate 10.
[2] Plate 12.
[3] Plate 30.
[4] Plate 7.
[5] Plate 11.

But they often found a color scheme that enhanced these things. If the color of Ingres is rarely lovely, it frequently has very great distinction. Such a portrait as that of Miss Wolfe [1] by Cabanel in the Metropolitan is certainly fine in color. So, too, are many pictures by Gérome, contrary to his established reputation. And the dull red and brown harmonies of Laurens have a sober dignity exactly suited to their subject matter. A careful study of their pictures leads to the conclusion that the academic painters usually knew exactly what they were doing when they used color and that the result is often very fine of its kind.

It is very remarkable that the work of this group of painters should have virtually disappeared from public view and should now be rated as third-rate art. An exception is made for Ingres, undeniably the greatest of them. The other academic painters are not even represented in retrospective exhibitions of nineteenth-century art. One can only consider with amazement that painters who, only a few years ago, had the acclaim of the entire civilized world, whose paintings sold for fantastic sums and whose classes attracted students from the ends of the earth, whose command of the art of painting no one living today can remotely rival, are generally regarded as negligible or bad. The underlying factors, political and artistic, which paved the way for this violent change of fashion were considered in the early part of this chapter. Other causative factors will be discussed in the chapters on impressionism.

[1] Plate 26.

CHAPTER VI

The Rebirth of Impressionism

Je dois m'accuser encore d'avoir été l'un des premiers à donner le mauvais example que l'on a suivi, en ne mettant pas dans le choix des sujets que j'ai traités et dans leur exécution cette séverité que recommandait notre maître [David] *et qu'il n'a jamais cessé de montrer dans ses ouvrages.*

GROS

Il est mort le Bonhomme classique;
Hélas! le v'là donc z'enfoncé!
On dit que c'est le Romantique
Et le bon goût qui l'ont tué.
Malgré son age et sa faiblesse
Il eut z'encore vécu queuqu'temps
S'il eut z'été dans sa vieillesse
Soutenu par ses p'tits enfants.

Cadet-Butteux à l'Enterrement du Bonhomme Classique, 1830

Every generation finds a way to rediscover some phase of the great and ancient manifestation which Art is. The most stimulating novelty is that which the preceding generation ignored, for the sake of its own pet theory.

CECILIA BEAUX

IT HAS BEEN SAID that all the great art of the nineteenth century was an art of revolt. Perhaps this statement could be made with some measure of truth about any great art, in the sense that such art has usually transcended the art which immediately preceded it. Frequently, though not always, the great artist has, in his maturity, done without a part of that technical equipment which he acquired in his youth. When this occurs he may appear to repudiate his early training, as well as the teachers from whom he derived that training, even though he owes to them the preparation which made possible his later growth. But, nowadays, when the above statement is made in regard to the nineteenth century, it should probably be interpreted to mean that the painters who revolted against the dominance of the Institut and of the Ecole des Beaux Arts produced the great art of their epoch. Understood in this way the statement may be true. But we should bear in mind, as I have repeatedly stressed,

that it will be many years before the artists of the nineteenth century, especially of its second half, have attained their permanent positions in the hierarchy of painters. For the moment we are still much too near them to be sure what those positions will be.

Whatever may be the final verdict of posterity as to their relative merits, there can be no question that many of the nineteenth-century painters who worked outside of the academic tradition were fine artists. The unfortunate thing was that the circumstances discussed in the last chapter should have forced them into a position of revolt. It is often in the nature of artists to differ from their teachers or from their contemporaries, and these differences may easily bring about unfriendly relations between individuals. But until the French Revolution such things did not lead to anything that could be called revolt or embittered sectarianism. They resulted simply in the establishment of rival traditions, which the state was wise enough to utilize simultaneously. The Signoria of Florence gave commissions to both Michelangelo and Leonardo. Julius II obtained masterpieces from Raphael as well as from Michelangelo. Watteau, Chardin, and Grueze were all admitted to the old Académie Royale. But the official status of the Institut, its restricted membership, and its origins in the limited sectarianism of David's atelier made it appear in the role of a despotic power, dealing with any divergence of opinion as if it were high treason. Now the nineteenth century was an age of growing individualism, of protest against authority, and of increasing assertiveness on the part of the masses of the people. Consequently, any art which ran counter to the schools of painting identified with the government was hailed by the forces of the left as for that very reason vital and progressive. Unfortunately, the great traditions of craftsmanship were in the hands of the academicians. So, while the insurgent movements were often led by men of great talent, it was their misfortune that circumstances placed them in seeming opposition to the painters who retained these great traditions. It was the tragic error of the lesser men who followed later that they identified the abandonment of those traditions with talent, artistic vitality, and political liberalism.

In this lies the origin and the explanation of the notion, so prevalent today, that skillful, learned, or even merely careful, painting implies a conservative or reactionary attitude of mind. On the other hand, handling which appears novel because it is innocent of the knowledge, ability, or sensitiveness which have always been the distinctive marks of the professional painter is classed as advanced, liberal, and open-minded. Owing to this absurd and artificial association, certain schools of painting have acquired many devotees who are attracted, not so much by the pictures these schools produce, as by the intellectual or social attitudes their techniques are supposed to connote. This is of course, the sheerest nonsense, though it is very typical of much in the contemporary attitude toward painting. There is certainly no valid reason why ignorant and careless painting should indicate a kinship with liberal thought. Serious thinkers of the left would probably deplore the connection if they were aware

of the technical and pictorial quality of the pictures supposed to represent their positions in the world of art. It is surely worth noting that at the time of the French Revolution the situation was exactly reversed. The artistic counterpart of the politically revolutionary ideas was to be found in David and his followers, whereas the conservative and reactionary painters were the remnant of the old Académie Royale. David's artistic reform was wholly in the direction of greater clarity of style, of severity in drawing and design, whereas the technique connected with the monarchy was, comparatively, very loose and free, though not in the sense that modern painting has made us understand those terms. This fact alone should be sufficient to prove that good workmanship and precise drawing are not necessarily marks of Toryism. As a matter of fact it is grotesque to suppose that the ideological complexion of an artist can in any way add to or detract from the artistic value of the work he produces. It never has and it never will. The artist's emotional attitude to life is an important element in the art he produces just so far as it effectively stimulates his creative ability to produce work of artistic merit. The measure of that merit depends on the artistic qualities of the work produced, not on the nature of the initial stimulus.

It was a characteristic trait of nineteenth-century art that each of the important movements which met with opposition on the part of the Institut and of its satellites destroyed the prestige of a certain part of the older training. The first painter of influence to raise his banner in open hostility to the Institut, Delacroix,[1] decried the value of technical training entirely, though he himself had received a fairly good one under Guérin, and from his entourage emanated the view that inspiration and feeling were sufficient for the creation of a work of art. His own dramatic personality, his writings, and his genuinely remarkable artistic gifts gave authority to this attitude, which, probably for the first time in the history of painting, was adopted by serious persons setting out to be professional painters. It should be remembered, however, that Delacroix did lay great stress on the necessity of culture for the artist. But the next important movement, realism under the leadership of Courbet, denied the necessity of culture, or even of education, in a painter. The position was that the straightforward observation of nature exactly as it appears, when beautifully rendered in paint, constitutes sufficient material for the production of a great picture. This is probably true up to a point, and a certain amount of fine painting has been produced by men of very mediocre intellectual attainment. But the idea that a wide general culture was unnecessary, or even antagonistic, to painting persisted and from that time has too frequently been given a general application. Courbet,[2] himself a man of very simple ori-

[1] Delacroix eventually was himself admitted to the Institut.

[2] The superior attitude toward the art of the past assumed by Courbet was largely a pose. Actually he frequented the Louvre and was a zealous student of the masters.

Jules Breton, his friend and junior contemporary, writes of him in his own autobiography (*The Life of an Artist*, translated by Mary J. Serrans. New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1890): "He frequently copies the

gins, definitely identified his art with the socialist theories that were rife in Europe at the time. It was easy to set up his simple and direct painting of proletarian subjects as an art of the people, in oppostion to the learned and literary art of the government-sponsored Institut. But Courbet also happened to have quite extraordinary gifts as a painter. These gifts, as well as his direct approach to nature, uncomplicated by ideas of intellectual origin, made him the precursor and prophet of the most important artistic movement of the century. This was the impressionist movement, which emphasized the function of painting as a means of presenting the artist's vision of what was before his eyes.

The name "impressionist," first applied in derision to a small group of French landscapists, has since been given a larger meaning and is now widely used to designate the entire category of painters, in whatever period they may have worked, who have been mainly preoccupied with rendering their impressions of the visible world. The word "impressionism" admirably suggests this purpose and differentiates it from a realism which seeks to imitate appearances, rather than to convey an artist's reaction to those appearances. It is in this larger, and now generally accepted, sense that I use the words in these pages. Like all major trends in the history of art, nineteenth-century impressionism was brought to birth by the advent of individuals whose temperament led them to seek expression in new fields. These particular men had no interest in the semiliterary art of the academicians and consequently were dissatisfied with the technical methods taught in their ateliers. Indifferent to the world of the imagination, they were deeply stirred by the world they saw about them. The task they set themselves was to render in paint that world as they saw it, and they took for guides those masters of the past who had been controlled by a similar purpose. Just as the academic painters based their styles on the great Italians, these men turned to the artists of Holland and Spain. Above all, Velasquez seemed to possess the artistic virtues they most prized. With these great examples in mind, this little group set about the serious task of painting what they saw, in all its dignity. Their names are now familiar. Fantin-Latour, Manet, Carolus Duran, Degas, Alfred Stevens, Whistler—these were the pioneers of the nineteenth-century impressionism. But at the same time, at first quite separately, another group of painters were seeking to paint landscape with an attitude of similar humility in the presence of nature. It was only gradually that the landscape painters came to influence the methods and the ideas of the studio painters. But the revolutionary discoveries made by those who

patina of the Old Masters, and while rendering full justice to the genuine though limited gifts he has received from Nature, may it not be said of him that, like the wag who clothed himself in the livery of the Tuileries to preach his revolutionary doctrines, he has borrowed the livery of the Louvre to preach his pretended discoveries?"

Unfortunately in such cases the talk of a painter has often more influence on his followers than the admirable qualities to be found in his work.

worked from nature out-of-doors could not fail to interest all artists fascinated by prob
lems of rendering. In the later phases of nineteenth-century impressionism it was
the landscape element that seemed to dominate, for the technical methods evolved to
overcome the difficulties of rendering out-of-door effects were adopted in a large
measure by the indoor painters as well.

The student will understand nineteenth-century impressionism, as well as its rapid deterioration in the twentieth century, better if he bears in mind the conditions under which it developed. Its true character was that of a revival of some of the noblest elements in the art of painting, which had fallen into neglect in the teachings of a school too exclusively preoccupied with other elements. The trend of the times, as well as the narrow outlook of many individuals on both sides of the controversy, brought the two schools into violent opposition. For this hostility the academicians were at first chiefly to blame. But, as the impressionists acquired greater authority in the world, they outdid their former enemies in belligerence and in narrowness of outlook. A healthy school of painting requires an understanding of the principles of both methods. I say "school of painting," because individual artists not infrequently produce beautiful things by means of a one-sided equipment which happens to meet their particular artistic needs. Such painters cannot be other than very bad teachers. The fortunate accident which resulted in a harmony between their limited means and their limited aims is unlikely to repeat itself in their pupils. To these they will probably pass on chiefly their limitations. The transmission of limitations has been characteristic of the teaching of impressionist painters, and the limitations have increased with each transmission. In that sense impressionism may properly be called the greatest single disintegrating force in nineteenth-century painting. Rightly understood and balanced by the discipline incorporated in the old academic teaching, it should be an element of great vitality.

It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to the student that he should avoid being misled by the catch phrases and practices of the later impressionist teaching. A great number of these practices and the statements by which their originators sought to explain them were, in their first application, essentially sound. The student should seek as far as possible to discover those original applications and not accept current evaluations without questioning. It may be helpful for him to consider, in this connection, certain characteristics inherent in the impressionist outlook so that he may better realize how easily the exaggeration of these very characteristics may lead to the narrowing, and even the complete destruction, of craftsmanship in painting.

Impressionist painting is the expression of the artist's reaction to the appearances of the world about him. While this element enters to some degree into all good painting, many painters have made it subordinate to other objectives, only using so much of the appearance of nature as served their storytelling or their decorative purpose. But whenever painters have been too indifferent to the actual appearances of what

they were painting their work has failed to hold interest for any great length of time. In some this indifference has been due to an innate lack of sensitiveness to color and shape, which is another way of saying they lacked the gifts necessary for becoming painters, however great their intellectual powers may have been in other lines. In other men the ability to see, though latent, was not developed by proper training or was actually warped by bad teaching. The true perception of visual phenomena, though an aptitude for it must be inborn, requires a long training as well before it can be effectively used in painting. But there have been still other painters who have been too greatly preoccupied by their efforts to express certain intellectual or emotional concepts and whose interest in the visual has grown less as they grew older. The later work of these men demonstrates the sterility that overtakes any painter who neglects what is in point of fact the life-giving essence of the art he practices.[1]

In each of these cases the painter falls back on a formula of representation as a substitute for the direct personal vision of nature which he lacks or has not been taught how to utilize. Now the central article of faith of nineteenth-century impressionism was that all formulas of representation were necessarily bad. In this they were mistaken. I have tried to show that the painters of the academic tradition were justified in using coloristic formulas in their effort to create the dramatic storytelling pictures with which they were concerned. The particular kind of dignity and remoteness which is so essential a part of this type of picture is inevitably impaired by too close an approximation to the look of nature. Also, in painting the chief aim of which is decoration an even greater degree of convention is not only permissible but, under certain conditions, imperative. It is true that both the academic painter and the decorative painter are in danger of losing their contacts with nature. The one tends to become absorbed by the literary aspect of his pictures, the other by the purely ornamental quality of his decorations. This tendency is even more marked in the development of schools of painting than in that of individual painters. Great schools of painting have usually petered out as their teaching has increasingly consisted of simply transmitting formulas based on the firsthand observations of their great originators. Every great revival in the art of painting has been brought about by a return to the direct study of nature.

Now towards the middle of the nineteenth century many serious painters felt that the academic tradition had become an empty formula. In retrospect the academic painting which they attacked appears to have been far more alive than they

[1] An excellent example of this sort of painter was George Frederick Watts, who in his later years less and less frequently found a pictorial design that expressed his mental concept. Gustave Moreau is another artist similarly overweighted on the intellectual side. Many of us feel that Puvis de Chavannes became too indifferent to the form in which he clothed his ideas, though he kept his noble distribution of masses to the end. The German romanticists could be cited as painters who presented pictorial elements wholly inadequate for what they were trying to express. When Modern Painting can be suspected of any intellectual content at all it demonstrates how indifference to pictorial elements may be carried to the extreme limits of absurdity.

believed, as well as in far closer touch with the study of nature. The academicians of the time were for the most part very earnest students of form and even of certain limited aspects of color. I have already tried to show that the aspects of nature which they ignored would have been detrimental rather than helpful to their esthetic aims. But it was just these other aspects of nature, those due to the color effects of light and atmosphere, that especially appealed to the innovators. In re-emphasizing the importance of these aspects the impressionists rendered an invaluable service to the art of their time. Their contribution was a very great one indeed. I have been at some pains to describe the political, social, and artistic conditions in France which gave their movement the character of a revolt. Before the end of the nineteenth century the impressionist concept of painting had become the prevailing one. It had acquired the backing of the great majority of art students, of the fashionable world, and, what is especially important, the backing of many prominent writers. Government recognition was soon to follow. So when we go to look for information we now usually find the painting of the period presented to us as seen from the impressionist point of view, or from what writers understood that point of view to be.

In this literature considerable importance is attached to two things connected with the impressionist revival. The first of these is the contempt of the impressionists for the supposedly bad academic teaching of the day. The second is the use made by the impressionists of subjects drawn from simple incidents of the everyday life about them, in contrast to the literary or exotic subjects favored by the academicians.

The inability of several of the most conspicuous members of the impressionist group to get on with their teachers has been much featured by biographers. It gives a touch of drama to their lives. One of the most popular plots in all literature is the Cinderella plot, the story of the ugly duckling, the despised and rejected child who turns out to be the favorite of fortune. And the careers of a few of the impressionist painters do conform to this ever delightful pattern. Furthermore, these are precisely the men who have been hailed by some as the greatest of the group. But here again I recall the fact that we are still too near their period in point of time to feel any security about their eventual positions in the hierarchy of painters. The student should not allow his judgments to be confused by the conclusions that many have drawn from the relations of Manet, Monet, Renoir, Whistler, Bazille, and Sisley, for instance, with their teachers.

The supposed attitude of the impressionist painters toward the then established teaching is well expressed in the following quotation from Théodore Duret's book on Manet and the Impressionists.[1] Théodore Duret was not himself a painter, but he was personally acquainted with many of the group that exhibited under the name of Impressionists. He seems to have seen a good deal of Manet, having even sat

[1] I have written the word Impressionists with a capital letter when designating the group of painters who exhibited under the leadership of Claude Monet.

for him for his portrait. There is no doubt that he must have heard the latter talk about his work and about painting in general. All painters know how easily their professional opinions suffer distortion at the hands of even the most conscientious writers on art, so we cannot be sure that these words express Manet's opinion. It is, however, certain that they do express, in very mild terms, the view prevalent among painters at the turn of the century.

> The cult of the art of the Italian Renaissance [writes Duret[1]] had led to the belief that beauty, the ideal, art itself depended upon the observance of certain fixed rules, and was inseparable from certain particular types. The inventive genius of the great masters of the past had created a certain mould and type of beauty. It was held that diligent study was all that was required in order to perpetuate the beauty of these forms indefinitely, and that all the value of the original creation would be preserved if only the knowledge of how to reproduce the same kind of line and the same kind of figure were handed down from master to pupil in a sort of apostolic succession. According to this theory, genius lay within the attainment of any one who knew how to assimilate and possessed the trick of imitation.

Now as an interpretation of the ideas which the outstanding nineteenth-century academic painters held about teaching this is arrant nonsense. I have no doubt that the ateliers turned out a number of sedulous apes who may have gone through life with a conception of the teaching of art similar to that paraphrased by M. Duret. But it is absurd to suppose that any painter possessing the intelligence and knowledge necessary to paint even a pretty good picture of the academic type should believe for an instant that "genius lay within the attainment of any one who knew how to assimilate and possessed the trick of imitation." Furthermore, the study of the classic forms was only a part, and a comparatively small part, of the academic teaching of the time. In discussing academic painting I pointed out the value of this study both for the training of taste and as a means of acquiring certain abilities useful in making some kinds of pictures. When that sort of study is completely abandoned executive ability is demonstrably narrowed. This is evidenced by the painting of the present day when there is no painter living in America able to endow a figure with the dignified beauty so essential to monumental decoration. The very few painters who are able to give their ideal figures anything that approaches distinction do so by distorting the natural forms into a strange ugliness that serves to lift them from the commonplace.

Mr. Walter Pach tells of an interview with Renoir[2] in which the master attacked

[1] Théodore Duret, *Manet and the French Impressionists*, page 66.
[2] Walter Pach, *Queer Thing, Painting*.

the art schools of Paris during his student years. "The bad system begins in the schools," he said. "I was in all of them and all were bad. The professors were ignorant men; they did not teach us our trade. Even today I do not know whether my pictures will last."

Any comment from Renoir merits consideration, but his exact meaning here is not made clear. The assertion that the academic painters teaching at that time were ignorant men is not convincing. A large part of their knowledge might well have seemed wholly irrelevant to Renoir. But in the very science to which this quotation seems to refer, the handling of pigments, the great Frenchmen were well versed. Gérome's canvases have held their color admirably, as have those of his pupil Bargue. So have Cabanel's and Bouguereau's. That is to say, their pictures have apparently retained the color qualities their makers intended they should have. We can believe that they did not teach what they knew to the young Renoir; perhaps because of the large classes, perhaps because the boy did not get on with his masters. Their methods and aims were alien to his taste and temperament. But the outstanding academic painters were equipped with a vast body of knowledge superbly suited to their own purposes. They were not ignorant men.

And they did insist on the close study of nature. There is ample evidence of this in the fragments of their teaching which have been transmitted by their pupils.[1] But most conclusive of all is the evidence to be found in their own pictures. In their portraits and in the sharp characterizations of the secondary figures in their compositions these men demonstrated how searchingly they could render what was before them. The aspect of nature which they portrayed was not that which appealed most to the impressionists but it was an extremely important aspect. It was an aspect the study of which the impressionists themselves could ill afford to do without. The subsequent history of painting has demonstrated how little of that art can survive once the broad principles of a sound fundamental training have been abandoned.

Couture, for instance, is best known now as the teacher Manet could not get along with. It is usually forgotten that Manet worked in his studio for about six years.[2] It is clear from the evidence of the pictures themselves that Manet owed much of his ability to paint as competently as he did to these six years of study. He never became as skillful as Couture.[3] There are passages of painting by Couture that are surprisingly like some of Manet's work, though more subtle in both drawing and modeling than anything Manet ever did. Manet had the more brilliant personality and the more individual vision of the two. He was a great innovator and applied his talents to the exploration of new and untried paths. There is little doubt that he will hold a greater place in the history of painting than Couture. But it was the training he received from Couture that enabled him to use his talents effectively. And Couture was the better workman.

[1] E.g., Amaury-Duval, *L'Atelier d'Ingres* and Couture, *Entretiens d'Atelier*.

[2] Théodore Duret, *Manet and the French Impressionists*, page 10.

[3] See Plates 36 and 37.

A similar case of distorted values is that of the painter, Gleyre. Gleyre's name is familiar today because Whistler, Renoir, Sisley, and Monet studied under him for a short time. The four young men disliked his teaching and left the atelier. As all four subsequently became very famous the inference commonly drawn is that they were right to have left Gleyre when they did and that Gleyre's teaching was valueless, if not pernicious.

Now this is almost certainly not the case. Gleyre was a perfectly good secondary painter in the academic tradition, competent, very learned, and a sound technician. Delaroche, a skillful and learned painter, who turned out many well-trained pupils, Gérome among them, advised his students to study with Gleyre when he closed his own atelier. This fact, added to the internal evidence of Gleyre's own pictures, is strong indication that he was an excellent teacher. As Monet and Sisley restricted themselves almost entirely to landscape, their poor fundamental training in drawing probably did not greatly hamper them. This is by no means true of Whistler or Renoir. In *Men and Memories,* William Rothenstein,[1] who knew him well, tells us that "one of the most touching letters Whistler wrote was a letter to Fantin-Latour in which he regrets that he could not draw with the precision of Ingres." And he tells a story of a visit to Whistler's studio during which the painter, apparently forgetting his visitor's presence, examined his own canvases with an air of utter discouragement. Whatever one's estimate of Whistler's art, it is unreasonable to believe that it would not have been far superior had it been built on a solid foundation of draftsmanship. The same is true of Renoir's. The exquisitely observed color of Renoir's best work should not blind the student, as it has so many critics and amateurs, to the fact that he was never more than a mediocre draftsman and only too frequently drew atrociously. Not long ago I read a magazine article in which the writer said we should give credit to Gleyre for having taught Renoir composition. The real point is, however, that he did not have the opportunity to teach him nearly

[1] Rothenstein does not quote the passage directly but I suppose that he is referring to the following: "That demned realism made such a direct appeal to my vanity as a painter and, flouting all traditions I shouted with the assurance of ignorance, *'Vive la Nature!'* . . . Oh, why wasn't I a pupil of Ingres? How safely he would have led us!" (Letter to Fantin-Latour, quoted by Edward Simmons in his book, *From Seven to Seventy*, page 133.)

The passage is of such remarkable interest that it seems appropriate to quote the best part of it in the original French: *"Oh! que n'ai-je été un élève de Ingres! Je ne dis point cela par rhapsodie devant ses tableaux. Je ne les aime que médiocrement. Je trouve plusieurs de ses toiles, que nous avons vues ensemble, d'un style bien questionable, pas du tout grec, comme on veut le dire, mais très vicieusement français. Je sens qu'il y a bien plus loin à aller, des choses bien plus belles à faire. Mais, je répète, que n'ai-je été son élève! Quel maître il aurait été! Comme il nous aurait sainement conduit!"*
(Quoted from a letter to Fantin-Latour, written in 1867, in an article on Whistler by Léonce Bénédite, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1905.)

enough. Renoir at no time did more than turn out adequately balanced compositions. Their design never has an interest or a distinction of its own. And the majority of his canvases cannot be said to compose at all, lacking both unity and ordinary effectiveness. To say that a greater skill in these matters would have detracted from his genuine qualities is absurd.

William Rothenstein, in his absorbing book of memories, makes the following commentary which is characteristic of so many painters of his generation.

"Cézanne," he writes, "like Whistler, was a great amateur and like Whistler he proved that it is far better to be an inspired amateur than an uninspired professional."[1]

Perhaps, but need the issue be formulated in those terms? It is certainly better to be inspired than to be uninspired, and the artist has no choice which he shall be. But, whichever he happens to be, why should he not be professional in any case and learn his trade? It is singularly unfortunate that the antithesis between the inspired amateur and the uninspired professional subsists in so many minds today. Originating in the concept that the painters of the Institut represented the latter, whereas the former were abundantly to be found in the opposition, and in the corollary to this proposition, that the painters frowned upon by the Institut were the more important, the idea has done, and is doing, untold harm to the art of painting and to its would-be practitioners.

Now the student will have to face the facts squarely that nearly all the painters of the later nineteenth century at present considered important do come under the head of inspired amateurs. There may be a serious question in many cases as to the inspiration, but as to the amateurishness, there need be none. The outstanding exception to this statement is Degas, a magnificent artist who knew his trade thoroughly and who, incidentally, studied under Lamothe, a minor painter in the great academic tradition. But a number of the earlier painters who worked along principles that were impressionist in the larger sense, were well trained. Foremost among these was Alfred Stevens,[2] an unsurpassed craftsman, and such men as Carolus Duran, Gervex, Dagnan-Bouveret, Bastien-Lepage, and the young Besnard. These men have now been largely lost sight of and it is even difficult for those who are curious about them to see their pictures. Yet it is to them that the student should go if he wishes to see what happens when men of knowledge and skill address themselves to the problems

[1] *Men and Memories*, Vol. II, page 123.

[2] The Alfred Stevens referred to throughout these pages is the Belgian painter of that name, not the distinguished English sculptor, who likewise painted. Belgian by birth and early training, Alfred Stevens lived and worked for most of his life in Paris and can justifiably be connected with the development of painting in that capital. As he is comparatively little appreciated in America today the student needs perhaps to be reminded that among the painters of his time and those immediately following he was rated as a great master. Their opinion is not one to be ignored, for it was an era when fine painting was understood and appreciated. See Plate 41.

of impressionism. He will then realize that the men who followed were increasingly content to leave pictures that were incomplete or that presented a very limited aspect of nature. This tendency to incompleteness was in part due to certain characteristics of impressionist painting which I propose to discuss in the next chapter. But it was far more often due to the painter's lack of sound training.

The older system of training was ridiculed by many sincere painters because their particular interests lay in directions that held no appeal for the academic teachers. They did not appreciate, or they for a time forgot, that their own aims could be more completely attained by a painter in possession of the competence which these teachers sought to impart. But their criticism of the academic training made an immediate appeal to second-rate painters and to the vast majority of students. Traditional teaching made enormous demands on both teacher and pupil. Only a man in possession of very considerable knowledge and skill could pretend to teach and demonstrate the elements of this kind of painting. Only a student having exceptional enthusiasm, intelligence, and talent would be attracted by its stern discipline. It was in the interests of the half-trained painter who wished to make a living by teaching to believe that such knowledge was superfluous. The vast majority of young persons with a "taste for painting" were delighted to hear that it was not so difficult an art to learn after all. Once this happy principle became firmly established art teachers and art students multiplied with great rapidity until they reached the astronomical numbers that we see about us today. Unfortunately the number of good painters produced has decreased with equal rapidity.

The second point, the overstressing of which tends to obscure the really important issues raised by impressionism, is that of subject matter. The interest with which the impressionists turned to the contemporary life about them for their subject matter was the innovation which excited the greatest controversy, if we may judge the art criticism of the time. This is quite understandable, as the subject of a picture is usually a very much more important factor to the public than it is to those who paint. To the painter subject is most often little more than the starting point of his picture, as it were, the scaffolding without which its structure could not be established. Once the picture is finished the subject can be forgotten, much as the scaffold is no longer necessary to the completed building. This is, of course, not true of all painters. To some the expression of the dramatic, emotional, or symbolic meaning implicit in their subject is the very essence of their art. In painting the real importance of the subject lies in the stimulus it gives the painter for creating a work of art. The general public, however, is rarely able to judge the artistic merits of a painting independently of its subject, and to a large section of that public the subject is the only thing in a picture that matters at all.

Much has been written and said about restrictions which the nineteenth-century academic painters laid upon the sort of subjects which could properly be treated in

painting. It is certainly true that these men showed a marked preference for historical or poetical subjects. This preference was due in most cases to the particular taste of the individual painters and not to the dictates of a fashion. The genuine artist almost always paints the subjects that appeal to him, whenever he is not executing specific orders or making potboilers. Was it not Flaubert who said, *"Ce n'est pas nous qui choisissons les sujets, ce sont les sujets qui s'imposent à nous"*? It is certainly a view many, perhaps most, artists would echo.

The investigations of the psychoanalysts have brought some leaders in the fields of psychiatry and psychology to adopt the opinion that artists at any given period are attracted to a particular sort of subject matter by an emotional urge born of obscure impulses taking shape in the unconscious mind of the individual. The unconscious mind of the individual, I understand these investigators to believe, is very susceptible to influences emanating from the larger group of which he is a part. And so these obscure influences often result in the simultaneous appearance of similar ideas in men who have had no apparent points of contact whatever. I am obviously in no position to evaluate the scientific basis for such a theory. It seems a valuable and plausible explanation of the waves of esthetic fashion that from time to time sweep the civilized world and which do, in point of fact, often seem to have widely separated points of simultaneous origin.

The personal taste of the nineteenth-century realists, and later that of the impressionists, led them to explore the possibilities of contemporary subjects to a previously unknown degree. To this end they expended great ingenuity and originality, and the result of their efforts was to enlarge the scope of painting very considerably. But painting contemporary scenes was no new thing in European art. It was not even new in nineteenth-century France. Such subjects were being treated, even under the dominance of David's followers, by Lami, Granet, Bonvin, Boilly, and others. The really great innovation exploited by the impressionists was the treatment of these subjects in out-of-door light. The discovery of the artistic possibilities of light outside of studio conditions was the great novelty of the time. The new material which this discovery made available to painters was so varied and its pictorial uses were so startling and, at the time, so novel that it gave some justification for the view that the only subject matter worthy of a painter was to be found in the workaday world about him. The world of the imagination seemed to many less interesting in comparison and it presently became the fashion to ridicule pictures seeking to depict it. Once firmly established in power, the advocates of the contemporary subject became at least as intolerant as those of the classic subject had been in their day. Only painters who felt irresistibly drawn to expressing themselves through pictures of remote or imaginary scenes continued to paint them. But students, always very susceptible to the influence of artistic fashions, no longer cared to learn how such pictures could be made. This complicated and difficult art fell into disuse and by the end of the First

World War there was scarcely a painter living who knew the procedure needful for the execution of a painting representing an imagined scene or had the skill to carry it through to an effective degree of finish.

But the impressionist movement altered the attitude toward the subject matter of pictures in another and subtler way which ultimately was to have an even more unfortunate effect on the development of painting. Impressionist painting is the expression of the artist's reaction to the appearances of the external world about him. Now when a painter becomes exclusively absorbed by the appearance of things he is apt to grow indifferent to their intrinsic nature. Being himself deeply stirred by what the objects before him offer in terms of light and shade, color, and texture, he expects the average person to find these qualities as fascinating as he does, and he will often pay no attention to what the objects themselves suggest in terms of human experience. The emphasis that impressionists have always given to still life is an example of this point of view. And the point of view is in itself perfectly sound. History has shown that the beautiful portrayal of objects arranged in a manner pleasing to the eye is sufficient to give a picture enduring value as a work of art.

This attitude is entertainingly expressed by a passage in Mr. Evan Charteris' *Life of John Sargent,* quoting Edmund Gosse.

> One of Sargent's theories at this time (1885) was that modern painters made a mistake in showing that they know too much about the substances they paint. Of course, Alma Tadema with his marble and his metal was the eternal instance of this error. Sargent, on the other hand, thought that the artist ought to know nothing whatever about the nature of the object before him, but should concentrate all his powers on a representation of its appearance. The picture was to be a consistent vision, a reproduction of the area filled by the eye.

What makes this indirect quotation of John Sargent in his early years peculiarly valuable is that it expresses an important tenet of impressionist teaching in all its limited sectarianism. The impressionist painter concentrates his energies on observing his subject, as he paints it, with as fresh and unprejudiced an eye as possible. He often finds it useful, at certain stages of his work, to banish from his mind, as much as he can, his knowledge of the actual nature of the objects before him. This enables him to consider those objects in terms of visual appearance alone. To do this requires a certain knack not easy of acquisition. In helping students to acquire this very valuable knack and in demonstrating to them the nature of appearances, the teacher often finds it necessary to lay great stress on the desirability of ignoring the real nature of the objects being painted. It is the sort of idea that students are apt to carry to exaggerated lengths. The viewpoint that astonished Gosse in 1885 had become a commonplace among art students by 1900.

But note where this principle leads when it is made into a cult. From the idea that a dramatic or intellectual element is unnecessary in a painting it is only a step to the view that such elements are positively obnoxious. The perhaps too insistent stress the academicians had laid upon the intellectual side of pictures unquestionably drove some impressionists to overstatements in the opposite direction. But to deny the part that the intellect or the imagination may play in painting is to limit the possibilities of that art arbitrarily. The Sistine ceiling, Mantegna's "Crucifixion," [1] Titian's "Entombment," [2] or Rembrandt's "Christ at Emmaus" [3] make such a denial manifestly absurd. The impressionist insistence on considering a painting apart from its subject is as indefensible as the academic bias that only pictures with exalted subjects can be ranked as great art. But the academic view was superior to the impressionist from the standpoint of the student's training in that it made general culture a necessary part of the painter's equipment. As painting came to be understood more and more in terms of impressionism the desirability of culture, or even of general education, in a painter grew less and less evident. The result is sadly conspicuous today when the low standard of education among painters, even those prominent in their profession, is a matter for wonderment to all who come in close contact with them.

Another effect of the impressionist's indifference to the connotations of the objects he selects to paint has been that it increased the gap between him and his public. For the average man is unable to banish completely these connotations from his mind and refuses to consider objects solely in terms of their external appearance. A picture representing a pair of rubbers lying on a pillow together with a bunch of grapes gives him a sense of uneasiness. If it is a part of the painter's purpose to create that sense of uneasiness, well and good. But, as a result of impressionist teaching, many painters took the attitude that such sensitiveness to subject matter was a mark of the Philistine which the true artist should deliberately ignore. The simple fact is that it is merely human and a painter can ill afford to flout so universal a reaction. In one section of the public this attitude on the part of painters has led to a lack of interest in pictures so contrary to their common sense. Another section has learned to accept uncritically what they believe to be the painter's point of view. Both attitudes are detrimental to the healthy development of painting.

They are detrimental because a sound relationship between the artist and his public is necessary to this development. The painter who can produce effectively in his ivory tower, judging his work by purely subjective standards, is the exception and even these exceptions usually have given us exotic products of no great force. This is not to say, of course, that the artist primarily seeks to please his public. He may not seek to please it at all. But he does aim to reach an eventual public, to give a viable

[1] Plate 1.
[2] Plate 2.
[3] Plate 4.

form to whatever he is trying to express. In order to do this some point of contact with this public must be established.

Now the subject matter of a picture, and the painter's treatment of it, acts as just such a point of contact. It is often the one thing on which painter and public can really get together. The family that orders a portrait of Aunt Jane may be wholly insensitive to the design, to the subtleties of drawing and color, to the felicities of execution that go into the portrait. But they do know about Aunt Jane. They are pretty much in agreement about the length of her nose and the color of her hair and the size of her eyes. The painter is, up to a point, justified in feeling that Aunt Jane is for him chiefly the pretext for making a picture having the qualities of design, drawing, color, and execution that interest him. He knows that these are the qualities that will give lasting value to the portrait. But if he fails in representing the appearance of Aunt Jane he will have made a failure of the job which he has been hired to do.

Then one of two things can happen. The family know the picture does not look like Aunt Jane. They are on perfectly solid ground, for they are simply going by the evidence of the senses that orient them in their daily lives. According to this evidence the picture is a failure and they are justified in so considering it. So they put it in the attic. Or else somebody tells them that, though the picture looks nothing like Aunt Jane and perhaps very little like a human being, it has the sort of qualities that artists prize, qualities that make "Art," which are vastly more important than "mere likeness." And the family believe it and hang the picture in the parlor and eventually come to think that they like it.

Now the persons who have persuaded Aunt Jane's relatives to ignore the evidence of their own, perhaps limited, perceptions may be right. The picture which fails as a likeness may really have pictorial qualities which will give it an enduring value. On the other hand, they may be wrong. They may be talking about esthetic elements which they are just as incapable of evaluating as are the family of Aunt Jane. But in either case the family will have accepted the portrait on faith, against the evidence of the senses that they use in their ordinary judgments. The thing that they could have judged competently, the likeness of the picture to Aunt Jane, was lacking. They were in no way qualified to judge the merit of the picture by more subtle esthetic standards.

This accepting of art on faith, contrary to the standards of everyday common sense, is a characteristic of our modern age. I have found no evidence of a similar attitude in history. The artists of the past met the Philistine, if we must call him that, on his own ground. They gave him what he required in the way of storytelling or representation and by their treatment of these things raised their products to the dignity of works of art as well. I have no hesitation in saying that the necessity of meeting the demands of common sense helped rather than impeded them in their work. And I have no doubt that the patrons came nearer to a genuine understand-

ing of art by seeing what they asked for beautifully done than the modern amateur who from snobbery hangs on his wall a picture which at no point comes within reach of his clear understanding. Incomprehensibility has come to be the distinctive mark of really exalted art for many people today. There is reason to suspect that in our materialistic age many persons seek in the mysteries of art the solace that used to be found in the mysteries of religion. They find, apparently, the satisfaction that comes from an act of faith. The more the evidence of the senses is flouted the greater the act of faith and the greater the resulting satisfaction. That obscure impulse in human nature which was expressed by Tertullian's *"Credo quia absurdum!"* is perhaps at the root of the popularity of the so-called Modern Art.

All this strange development of recent years deserves more thorough and more scientific treatment than would be in place here or than I am qualified to give it. In retrospect it will probably be seen to have been more a part of the psychic history of our era than a part of the history of art. To the student of psychology the vogue of the so-called "Modern" schools of painting should prove a matter of vast interest and importance. To future students of painting the work of these schools is likely to seem quite negligible. There is a parallel between the hectic pursuit of painting we have seen in our generation and the dancing epidemics which swept over Central Europe in the Middle Ages. These strange epidemics are of interest to historians and to students of pathology, but I have never heard that they contributed to choreography or to the art of the dance. And so the students of the painting activities of our time will recognize that neither the persons who engaged in them nor those who hailed them with acclaim had any genuine interest in painting. There can be no doubt that a considerable percentage of both groups are sincerely and deeply interested in an emotional element that has crystallized about these productions. But this element they neither project by means of the language of painting nor do they show any perception of fine painting as such in the great work of the past. Their error may have been in their choice of painting as the vehicle by which to convey their message. Whatever the import of that message may be, it is unlikely that pictures so lacking in the qualities which have given lasting value to the paintings of the past will hold interest once the emotional aura which surrounded their creation has been dissipated.

In turning to the consideration of nineteenth-century impressionist painting itself let us then bear these things in mind. Let us remember that the movement originated in an atmosphere of belligerence and sectarianism which led the impressionist painters to exaggerate the statement of the principles by which they painted. Let us remember that these painters were not in a position to judge fairly the painters against whom they were reacting and whose aims they were temperamentally not qualified to understand. Let us remember that their statements and their artistic judgments were given a further exaggeration, were too often even distorted, by their students and their literary apologists and that it is the statements of these last which

have obtained the widest currency. And let us also remember that a small group of impressionists have benefited by a halo of martyrdom derived from the unfair treatment once given them and that the dramatization of this martyrdom may have given these particular painters an importance not entirely warranted by their painting. And, finally, let us not be diverted by considerations of subject matter and the undue stressing of its importance in painting.

CHAPTER VII

Considerations on Impressionist Painting

The purpose of the painter is simply to reproduce in other minds the impression which a scene has made upon him.

GEORGE INNESS

The impressionistic unity that lifts truth into poetry.

R. A. M. STEVENSON: *Velasquez*

Grasped with a strong hand, controlled by her master drawing, color is a splendid bride, with a husband worthy of her—her lover, but her master, too, the most magnificent mistress in the world, and the result is to be seen in all the lovely things produced from their union. But coupled with indecision, with a weak, timid, vicious drawing, easily satisfied, color becomes a jade making game of her mate, and abusing him just as she pleases, taking the thing lightly so long as she has a good time, treating her unfortunate companion like a duffer who bores her—which is just what he does. And look at the result! a chaos of intoxication, of trickery, regret, unfinished things.

WHISTLER: *Letters to Fantin-Latour*

As THE nineteenth-century impressionist movement recedes into the past certain misconceptions as to its nature have taken root which were not widespread during its heyday. It may help the reader to understand this form of painting to mention three things which it is not, but each one of which it is sometimes believed to be. Impressionism is not an attempt to give a factual representation of nature. Secondly, it does not seek to make an exaggerated statement of the individual painter's optical reactions. A misunderstanding of impressionist doctrine has made it possible to interpret it into either one of these two extremes, in accordance with the natural bias of the interpreter. Both are distortions of the impressionist painter's aim. And, thirdly, an impressionist picture is not necessarily a rapidly executed sketch. Let us consider each of these misconceptions in turn.

The impressionist painters themselves cannot be held responsible for the idea that they aimed at the literal imitation of nature. This sort of imitation, an attempt to deceive the eye which would reach its logical triumph in a sort of painted counterpart of waxworks, is, in fact, the very thing of all others most detestable to the impressionist. And there is no one thing which they more consistently and insistently

repeated to their students than the undesirability of such painting. Very often it was, I think, the only idea that they succeeded in getting across to the less-gifted of their pupils. And the idea is indeed of the utmost importance to any student of painting. It is some evidence of how easily the aims of painters are misunderstood by those who devote their time to pictures without being themselves able to paint them that these artists of only half a century ago are believed by a large number of critics, amateurs, and authorities on painting today to have been trying to do the very thing they most scrupulously sought to avoid. For this particular misconception can be laid wholly at the door of those who write and talk about art, but have no real contact with trained painters.

It is not very difficult for a competent painter to demonstrate to an intelligent student how an impressionist rendering of appearance differs from a literal transcription of appearance.[1] He does this most effectively by rendering certain passages himself and pointing out their relation to the objects from which they are painted. He will also point out bits of rendering in pictures by the masters and compare them with similar passages in the work of inferior men. And, first and last and all the time, he will apply the same principles in his discussion of the student's own work from nature. If the student is sensitive and intelligent the relation that these various renderings bear to the appearance of the objects they seek to portray will gradually become evident to him. Gradually, too, he will realize the enormous superiority of one rendering over another and he will begin to sense, rather dimly perhaps, that the difference in their quality is due to the greater or lesser significance of the truths stated by the painters. The student who really perceives this is still a long way from being a painter himself, but he has taken a most important step in that direction.

These things are not very difficult to demonstrate over a period of weeks in a studio. But to make them evident, by means of writing, to any person not already conscious of them is perhaps impossible. Considering how very ably this attempt has been made, by R. A. M. Stevenson in his book on Velasquez, by Philip L. Hale in his book on Vermeer, and by Kenyon Cox in various essays, and how little the matter is still understood, one may be justified in concluding that it is impossible. Hopeless as the task seems to be, I cannot dodge the obvious necessity at this point of trying to give some sort of brief definition of impressionist representation.

The impressionist's representation differs from a factual representation of nature, from the *trompe-l'œil,* in that it seeks to represent nature as it is seen by an artist's eye. That is to say, it is a vision of the world as seen by an eye exceptionally sensitive to its appearance and to its beauty, which is perhaps the very definition of a painter's eye. There can obviously be no clear-cut definition of such a sensitiveness, any more than there is a royal road to its acquisition. And in each individual artist it has a particular character of its own. But the general statement can perhaps be made

[1] See Plates 44 and 45.

that the perception of the impressionist comes from his seeing things in their relationship to each other, whereas the ordinary person sees them in a series of piecemeal observations. The impressionist grasps the scene before him as a whole and seeks to transcribe to his canvas the impression which that entity makes upon him. The mere realist paints his vision of each separate object and his picture ends up as a compilation of separate observations which are in reality incompatible. That is to say, no human eye could see at one time all of those objects with an equal degree of definition and coloration. Such a picture may be the result of great labor and of considerable skill but it does not require the power of synthesis and co-ordination necessary to the making of an impressionist painting. However, as it corresponds to the conventional concept of what things look like, which is firmly lodged in the mind of the average man, it will in all likelihood seem to him the more "like nature" of the two. This sort of painting has been mistaken for impressionism by both its would-be admirers and by its detractors.

At the other end of the scale we find those who emphasize the personal element in the vision of the painter and who consider that impressionism consists of a representation which stresses any deviation from the normal in the artist's way of seeing things. And, indeed, once it is granted that the artist sees the world differently from the average man, it is easy to assume that if one sees the world differently one must be an artist and, furthermore, that the more one's seeing varies from the average the greater an artist one must be. The spread of this idea among students and mediocre painters was one of the aftermaths of the acceptance of impressionism. It is certainly one of the most attractive ideas ever held out to struggling, untalented young people, leading them to the triumphant discovery that their very clumsiness and stupidities were really signs manual of their being artists, merely results of their "personal vision." In contemporary "Modern Art" we see where this idea can take them.

Probably every one who has ever worked in a class where the teaching was based on the impressionist outlook will remember pupils who justified the most fantastic renderings of the model with a wistful, "But I see it that way!" A sharp-tongued teacher of the older school was wont to counter, "Then you should go to an oculist, not an art-school." To a student who attempted to forestall him by suggesting there might be something wrong with his eyes, the master retorted, "Oh! no, with you the trouble is a little higher up." This was before the war of 1914. More recently I do not think many teachers have risked such biting rebukes.

The most distinguishing trait of the impressionist painter is that he really cares about the appearance of nature. It is something that strikes him as being supremely beautiful and which he approaches with humility and reverence. Zola gave us the definition, "Art is nature seen through a temperament." [1] It is an admirable description of impressionist art. But it is profoundly characteristic of the impressionist temperament to feel that the beauty of nature as he sees it is something that need not be improved upon. "Cannot be improved upon," is the phrase that is more likely to come to his lips. It was for their attempt to improve upon nature that the impressionists most severely berated the academicians. They failed to see that the academicians were as sincerely absorbed in rendering an imagined world of the mind with the maximum intensity as they themselves were sincere in rendering the world before their eyes. They further failed to see, or at least to explain to their own followers, that the great academicians did not seek to improve upon nature but, by a process of selecting from elements found in nature, to create their ideal world. The two attitudes, when genuine, emanate from widely different temperaments, not from fashions or training. The dominant trait of the impressionist painter is a passionate absorption in the beauty of what he sees and an intense desire to render that beauty just as he sees it.

And so it is that great impressionist painting has about it an impersonality that prevents its achieving the wide popularity of certain other kinds of art. During the nineteenth-century renascence of impressionism popular attention was directed toward the magnificent art of Velasquez. But the cultured public never really took to him and derived what pleasure it could from the picturesqueness of his sitters and the exotic quality of their costumes. The grandeur of his vision of nature and the mastery of his statement of that vision will always remain perceptible to comparatively few. It was with an almost audible sigh of relief that the cultured world turned to the more readily dramatized Greco and welcomed the dictum of the *cognoscenti* that he was by far the greater artist of the two. Similarly, one wondered, even in the heyday of the vogue for Vermeer, how many of his vociferous enthusiasts really perceived the qualities that made him different from Metzu and Terburg, or even from their second-rate contemporaries. Judging from some of the pictures catalogued by experts as Vermeers and accepted as such, one is not led to make an optimistic guess. The rarity of his paintings will probably keep their collector's value very high. But I venture to predict that the popular interest in them will presently wane. Indeed, my attention has been called to passages in recent books on painting belittling his art as "mere workmanship." If such men as Velasquez and Vermeer meet with so little understanding and genuine appreciation it is not to be wondered at that the lesser men who practiced the same austere form of painting should be little prized. Impressionist painting will never be very popular or be widely understood for its genuine qualities, but there will always be a certain number of persons to whom it seems one of the most deeply satisfying forms of art.

For the moment we are less concerned with the healthy manifestations of the impressionist viewpoint than we are with the aberrations which resulted from the later interpretations of that viewpoint. And it is easy to see how the tenet that each artist should paint nature as he himself sees it can be stretched to justify the most grotesque attempts at painting. That it has been so stretched and that the results have

[1] *"Un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament."*

seemed justified to at least a sizable group of people is now a matter of history. Yet the basic idea that nature does not look quite the same to any two people and that the individual artist's particular way of seeing nature is an important factor for better or for worse in the picture he produces is perfectly sound.

Setting aside persons whose vision is definitely abnormal, the color-blind or the extremely astigmatic, there would seem to be no very great difference in the way the visible world appears to our eyes. We are all able to agree on the appearance of most objects. This is demonstrated in particular when several persons are confronted with two objects that are similar, or very nearly so. All will agree as to the points of similarity or dissimilarity, unless these latter happen to be very subtle indeed. The differences between the way of seeing of one man and that of another man are so slight that the vast majority of human beings can go through life without suspecting that they even exist.

Not so the painter. For the painter is first and last a man whose business is seeing. In painting the difference between one man's way of seeing and another man's remains very slight but becomes very important. The individual artist's way of seeing is influenced by his particular visual apparatus, by the selective processes of his intellect, and by that obscure emotional reaction we call taste. To analyze it much beyond this will require further researches on the part of the oculists and of the psychoanalysts as well. For our present purposes such a crude summary must serve.

Now the two last named factors in the artist's way of seeing have long been recognized as tremendously important elements in the make-up of a picture. They are more than anything else finally responsible for the distinction and style of its execution. The artist, as he works, continually selects for emphasis those elements of shape or color or accent which he thinks will give meaning to his work or which he feels will contribute beauty. Just as constantly he is on the watch to suppress or minimize anything which will militate against those qualities. The greatest painters have usually done this with such subtlety that the average eye is unaware of the process. Only the trained eye of the painter, seeking to retrace their steps, perceives the vast knowledge and prodigious art that enter into the renderings of Leonardo, Vermeer, Raphael in his portraits, Veronese, Ingres, Velasquez, or Holbein, to name a few of the greatest, as well as into those of lesser men. In the pictures of certain other painters the personal bias of the artists has led them to alter form to the verge of distortion. We see this with magnificent results in the younger Michelangelo and, far less happily, in the paintings of his old age and in those of his followers. But, whenever successful, this personal touch has been something added by an artist as a last refinement to his work. Artists of the first rank have derived their style, as this personal touch is usually called, from their own reaction to what they saw. Those of the second rank have often been content to adopt and exaggerate a style evolved by some other artist. But from the time that European painting had acquired a fairly complete com-

mand of its means, that is, from about the middle of the fifteenth century, all painters that have found their permanent place in the first or second rank were able to make a quite accurate and impersonal representation when they chose. This is demonstrated in their rendering of accessories. It was only in their treatment of the human form, and perhaps of the draperies that set off the human figure, that they resorted to stylization. When they painted an urn, a chair, or a carpet, they showed the accuracy of their eyes and the skill of their hands. The single exception to this statement is El Greco, in whose later pictures the accessories are certainly as fantastically distorted as the figures. But, as he is an isolated case in five centuries of painting, I think he can be taken to be the exception that proves the rule. The whole subject of El Greco's distortions and of his importance as a painter is at the present time so controversial that any adequate discussion of it would necessitate a very long digression.

Now, until the middle of the nineteenth century this stylization was almost exclusively confined to the treatment of form. That is to say, it was a matter of drawing. Up to that time few painters were greatly concerned with rendering color as it really appears in nature. One might say that in coloring they aimed at plausibility on the one hand and at decorative beauty on the other. And, indeed, to achieve a combination of these two things is to have created a work of art. Whenever one of the older painters made a very conspicuous departure from the generally accepted color formula of his period it was probably because he thought he was making a handsome color scheme, not that he saw nature that way. As exceptions to this one thinks of Piero della Francesca, Correggio, Titian, Veronese, Moretto, El Greco, Velasquez, Rembrandt occasionally, Vermeer, and Chardin. And that is about all. Other painters seem to have been content to use the color formula current in their day. Of course, to the extent that they studied the colored appearance of nature the men in the above list were impressionists according to our definition.

The student must be warned against mistaking eccentric color due to changes in pigment for the coloring intended by the painter. All old oil paintings have, of course, altered to a certain extent. The most familiar change is toward the golden brown tonality due chiefly to superimposed layers of varnish. In some pictures the color of the ground on which they were painted or the tonality of their monochrome preparations have come through and given them a color quality certainly not intended by the artist.[1] But the most bizarre color effects to be found in old pictures are caused by the fading of certain fugitive pigments used by their painters. It is the pictures in this latter category which are most apt to lead the unwary into supposing that the painters of the past introduced fanciful colorings into their renderings of nature.

To the impressionist the world he looks at seems made up entirely of patches of color. The earlier impressionists relied more on rendering the values of these patches correctly than on making very subtle notations of their color. That is to say, while

[1] E.g., Plate 31.

they took great pains to get exactly the relative degrees of light and dark in the tones they saw in nature, they paid comparatively little attention to the color of those tones. The great innovation of the nineteenth-century impressionists consisted precisely in directing the attention of painters to color relations as they manifest themselves to the eye in the ever changing world about us.

Whatever we see in this world can be reduced to three component elements, shape, value, and color. When a painter considers the shapes of the masses that enter into his field of vision the result is what we call drawing. We call values the relative quantities of light and dark that enter into those masses. It is evident that a fairly complete degree of representation can be achieved by means of these two elements without the use of color.

The primitive artist is almost exclusively preoccupied by his desire to render the shapes of objects. As art develops there is a tendency to fill in these shapes with a sort of broadly descriptive coloring. It is as if the painter should say, "This object is blue, this other object is green." But he makes little attempt to indicate the varying degrees and kinds of blues or greens he has observed on the objects specified. Such selections of tint as he may make are generally influenced by his idea of decorative beauty. Both outline, silhouette in monochrome, and what I have called descriptive coloring have produced art of a very high order.

The study of values seems to be limited to European painting and to schools of painting deriving their methods from Europe. As far as I know, none of the primitive painting of the world nor the very highly developed art of Asia took any real cognizance of this element in representation. In Europe chiaroscuro reached virtually its full development at about the time of Leonardo. Since then, and until very recently, the careful study of values has been considered an essential part of the painter's means of expression, except in certain strictly decorative applications of painting. Of late years there has been a swing in the other direction and certain modern schools have pointed out what seemed to them the superiority of the non-European painting which ignored values as we know them. These modern schools have sought, by eliminating the consideration of values, to achieve the qualities which they found in this non-European painting. One can find no fault with this purpose nor with their means of attaining it, though one may question the interest of the results. But it seems to me certain that no student can afford to neglect the study of values or to discard them until he has first learned to transcribe them accurately.

The perception of colors as they really appear in nature was a still later development in European painting than the perception of values. From the time of Leonardo painters realized that the varying degrees of light and shade received by the different parts of a colored object altered the quality of its color. These alterations they first perceived as being chiefly a lightening or a darkening of the local color of the object. That is to say, they interpreted the alterations to be differences of value. Slowly paint-

ers became aware that the quality and degree of the lighting altered the apparent nature of the local color as well as its value. They observed for instance that the brightest light on a blue drapery might be not merely a lighter blue than that which appeared in the half tone, but a blue of a different kind, a greener blue, perhaps. They observed that in certain lights the less positive colors seemed entirely to lose their intrinsic nature. They realized that the colors which enter our field of vision are deeply effected by light, atmosphere, and the degree with which we focus our attention on a particular part of that field.

The great original contribution of the nineteenth-century impressionists lay in their full realization of our perception of color and all its implications for the painter's art. The perception of color was the cornerstone on which they built and the discoveries to which their study of color led them revolutionized our ideas of rendering appearances in paint. It is little to be wondered at that the painters of that time were carried away by these discoveries and in their enthusiasm believed that they were destined to carry the art of painting to a new and greater development. We, in retrospect, feel that the new understanding of color has added to the technical resources of the painter but are inclined to question the greatness of the art which has hitherto resulted from its application.

Let us now return to the matter of the painter's individual way of seeing as an element in a work of art. Until the advent of the nineteenth-century impressionist movement stylization was, as I have said, almost wholly restricted to subtle alterations of form. The deliberate alteration of value relations has never been successfully tried. There is probably no difference in the way we each perceive the relative degrees of light and dark as we look about us. At any rate even slight errors of value in a picture are at once detected and give the beholder a sense of wrongness. The complete elimination of these values gives a sense of unreality, which is a very different thing, and is often a source of esthetic pleasure. But if values are introduced into a painting they must be pretty nearly right or they will look quite wrong. So it may be said that until interest was shifted to perception of color the painter's latitude in the interpretation of appearance was severely restricted by the capacity of the average eye to measure shapes and to recognize values. It was only on subtleties of interpretation that the artist and his public were likely to disagree.

When the interest was shifted to rendering appearances in terms of color two important elements of uncertainty were introduced. The first of these lay in the different ways in which colors appear to the eyes according to the focus of attention adopted. Here again I must attempt to restate what should be a commonplace in the teaching of painting, for I have reason to believe that it has been forgotten in many of the art schools and classes of today. One may look at a scene in such a way that one's interest is diffused over pretty much the entire field of vision. Or one may look at the same scene while focusing the attention on a particular part of it, let us say on

a red chair in the middle of a room. Now the objects in the room will not have quite the same appearance in the two instances. In the first case all of them, including the red chair, will be perceived with a certain degree of vagueness. It is the entire room that is receiving attention and the individual objects will take their places in it without one's being aware of all their detail. In the second case we see the red chair in great detail, but as our eye is focused to take in that detail all the other objects become very much less defined. The degree of definition will be largely established by their greater or lesser remoteness from the red chair, which is, for the time being, the focus of our vision.[1] The awareness of such changes as these is a fundamental part of impressionist painting. Perhaps the most important alterations made by changes in the focus of vision are alterations in the degree of definition with which objects are perceived. But they also alter the appearance of color. The red of the chair does not appear as quite the same red in the two cases cited above.

This is a very inadequate description of a phenomenon the discussion of which should be a commonplace of art teaching and is, I hope, familiar to every student. This brief description should be sufficient to show how the impressionist attitude toward rendering introduces a factor of uncertainty between teacher and pupil and, in its exaggerated forms, between artist and public. It opens the way for the obvious justification, "But I see it that way!" on the part of the painter. And the worst of it is that, truthfully made by a superior artist in full possession of his technical means, it is indeed a justification.

It is in the teaching of painting that the misunderstanding of this extremely subtle and important aspect of seeing has wrought the greatest havoc. Since it is a vitally important part of all painting having an impressionist element it cannot be slighted or dodged. And yet it at once gives the student an avenue of escape which may destroy the effect of all the rest that he is being taught. My own observation has led me to two conclusions. The first is that if the student acquires the ability to get his shapes and his values correctly the danger of his coming to shipwreck on the shifting shoals of color relations is minimized. The second is that during the student years the importance of individual reactions to color as opposed to average reactions should be minimized. Unfortunately most of the teaching that derived from impressionist principles did the exact opposite on both counts. As time went on they stressed less and less the necessity of exactitude in drawing and in values. Of this I shall have more to say later. And secondly, the cult of personal vision became the great drawing card of too many art classes. These two things have had a paramount influence in bringing about the collapse of anything resembling sound training.

There is a second element which works for lack of agreement where rendering of apparent color is concerned, one which has been given very little heed by painters and teachers of painting. I think that the variations in the perception of color due to

[1] E.g., Plates 48 and 49, as well as 46, 47, 50, and 51.

the individual's seeing apparatus are greater than is generally supposed. The more obvious manifestations of color blindness are, of course, familiar enough. Oculists also recognize that there are mild forms of this idosyncrasy which, while they do not incapacitate persons from recognizing colors, do render them less sensitive to some colors than to others. Certain tests have been devised whereby these deviations of the organ of sight can be detected. But I am inclined to believe that deviations of this sort, too slight to be detected by any hitherto invented scientific test, are very common. I see no other explanation for the fairly wide divergence between the color of nature and the color in the pictures of certain quite skillful painters who openly profess their determination to reproduce the "look of the thing." In the work of these men it is noticeable that the deviation repeats itself in all their pictures of a given period. One man will for a number of years paint all his pictures a little too gray and then, without changing his professed viewpoint, paint them all a little too red. One can only suppose that there has been a change in his optic nerves. Or another painter will paint all the red objects in his picture of a nearly identical red, however diverse the reds of the originals may be, although his pictures are fairly true where other colors are concerned. Such deviations do not necessarily affect the artistic merit of the painter's work. They may even introduce an element of beauty. But their recognition is important when it comes to teaching. A teacher should watch for signs of such mild color blindness in his pupils and teach those afflicted with it to recognize and utilize their peculiarity instead of being baffled and misled by it.

The third misconception as to the nature of impressionist painting is the view that an impressionist picture is necessarily a rapidly made notation. I do not deny that impressionist pictures often are that, but it is not the rapidity of their making nor the cursory quality of their statement that makes them impressionist pictures. However, this misconception, unlike the first two that I have cited, has in it a considerable element of truth. Certainly a consideration of it will add to the understanding of impressionist painting.

"*L'Impressionisme,*" said Claude Monet in an interview[1] during his last years, "*ce n'est que la sensation immédiate. Tous les grands peintres étaient plus ou moins impressionistes.*" We cannot, of course, be certain of what the great French landscape painter meant by this statement. I interpret it to mean that the characteristic of the impressionist painter is that he tries to set down on canvas his immediate reaction to what he sees before him. In order to lose nothing of the force of this reaction he usually makes it his practice to paint only in the presence of his subject.

In a sense this attitude does predicate a certain rapidity of execution. Even if the subject he is painting is of a fairly unchanging sort the freshness of the painter's reaction is necessarily fleeting. The artist must either complete his picture before that freshness fades or he must use all the resources of his art to recapture his first impres-

[1] Cited by Evan Charteris in his life of John Singer Sargent.

sion during the long days or weeks of labor that the picture may require. If he is successful the finished painting will give an impression of spontaneity and even of rapid execution that may be deceptive.[1] The artist has managed to transmit to the beholder his "*sensation immédiate*." I take it to be in this sense that Monet held all the great painters to have been more or less impressionists.

Now it is true that many of the leading painters of the nineteenth-century impressionist group were interested in interpreting the fleeting aspects of nature. Some of them, like Monet himself, were fascinated by the transient phenomena of light and devoted infinite pains to recording its most subtle effects. Others, like Degas, studied the human figure in action, with a marked predilection for the momentary, expressive gesture.[2] These two particular artists attained their ends by slow and laborious methods. But a number of very brilliant painters, interested in not dissimilar objectives, evolved a rapid, summary execution which was immediately adopted and imitated by a host of lesser men. It is this rapid, sketchy method that many persons identify with impressionism.[3] A by-product of nineteenth-century impressionism it undoubtedly was, but it is wrong to mistake it for impressionism itself. As not infrequently happens, in this case the by-product in its more superficial forms had a more widespread influence on the subsequent development of painting than did the fundamental ideas of impressionism.

The tendency of the nineteenth-century impressionist movement to produce sketches and partially made pictures deserves the careful consideration of the art student. The value of the sketch, the study, or the unfinished painting, even their artistic superiority over finished pictures, is one of the things that the later impressionists have loudly proclaimed and which came to be generally accepted. It was perhaps the most harmful single idea to which they gave currency. The danger of the idea lies in its effect on the student, always glad of an excuse to avoid difficulties. For to finish a picture is a very difficult task indeed. It requires the knowledge and ability to complete each of the parts without losing their relation to the whole. Furthermore, it is only as the picture nears completion that the errors in its structure and composition become fully evident. A surprising number of the compositions by Sargent, Chase, Besnard, Zorn, or Tarbell would fall to pieces if they were pushed through and made all over. The work of many lesser men is only tolerable because of their avoidance of definite statement.

Now let me say at once that lack of finish as a deliberately chosen factor in the effect of a picture did not exist before the end of the nineteenth century. Painters frequently made sketches when, for one reason or another, their time was limited, or as preparations for large pictures. These sketches, when made by very able men, remain delightful things in themselves. But they were the exception in the artist's work,

[1] E.g., Plate 35.

[2] Plates 21 and 38.

[3] E.g., Plate 61.

never the rule. I cannot think of a single painter before 1850 who made only sketches, as has been the case with so many in recent years.[1] In addition to these sketches a number of paintings have come down to us that were never finished. But these were the result of accidental circumstances. There is no evidence that the lack of finish was planned by the artist as part of his effect. When the pioneers of the nineteenth-century impressionist movement left a picture unfinished it was because they were unable to carry it further successfully. I wish to qualify the derogatory implication of this statement by repeating that to push an impressionist picture to a high degree of finish is extraordinarily difficult. It is, perhaps, technically the most difficult thing in the entire range of painting. And it is quite a different proposition from that of finishing an illustrative or a decorative painting. In the former, or academic, type of painting, finish may consist of rendering each part of the picture according to the particular convention the artist has established for himself. When this has been properly done to each separate detail the convention itself will bind the pieces together to give the picture a unity, provided it has been adequately planned. Finishing a decorative painting is more a matter of filling each part of the space to be covered with a kind of ornamental embroidery. The unity achieved will result from the way in which this embroidery has been distributed over the surface of the picture. But the unity of an impressionist picture is derived solely from the eye and mind of the painter and will only exist if everything in the picture is stated with exactly the relative emphasis which it possesses for the painter as he looks at the scene before him.

The working approach of an impressionist painter may serve to illustrate my point about finish, as well as to demonstrate certain fundamental differences between him and the academic painter.[2] Before he starts working, the impressionist has actually before his eyes the scene he intends to transfer to canvas. He will shift around the objects in front of him, or, if he is to paint a landscape, he will move his own position, until what he sees composes satisfactorily. Such preparation is enormously important in this kind of painting, requires the knowledge bred of much experience, and may occupy the painter for many days. Once the subject he is to paint is arranged before him his job is to transfer that scene, *as it appears to him*, onto his canvas. It will now be very much to his advantage to establish the principal masses of color on his canvas as quickly as possible, as it is only then that he can proceed to work out the relations of the smaller color spots with much chance of success. Once these large areas of color are established and the entire canvas is covered his procedure will be to work

[1] I certainly make no exception for Franz Hals. Hals's marvelous dexterity permitted him to keep an air of freshness and rapid execution in all his work. Furthermore, his manner of execution is deceptive, probably intentionally so. But the great paintings of Hals's best period are very completely finished. One has but to examine the treatment of the costume in the Frick Collection portrait and to look at reproductions of the "Laughing Cavalier" and "The Child with Nurse" to realize what he could do in the way of complete rendering.

[2] See Plates 54 and 55.

into them, subdividing them into smaller areas. As a result his tendency is to consider those shapes of the smaller masses which constitute drawing only at this later stage of his work. Now, to establish the large color relationships that appear in nature is a fascinating task and one which at once reveals the quality of the painter's perception. In the hands of a skillful artist this initial operation often results in a thing which is beautiful in itself. Every touch that subsequently is added must be correct in its relation to everything previously painted or the effect of the whole will be destroyed. As the statements of color become more numerous and more complex the risk of destroying the unity of the work increases. It is only natural that the painter who feels he has already achieved an important part of his effect will hesitate to jeopardize it by adding further statements which he considers less essential. To painters trained in this way, a good "start" is an interesting and valuable thing when the color relations are beautifully and truthfully stated. Their appreciation of this is a professional one, that of a difficult job well done, the quality of which their own training has enabled them to recognize. But of what interest can so purely professional a performance be to the public? Can they be expected to take interest in a statement of color relations primarily intended as a basis for further development? I do not know. The painters have succeeded in getting the public to accept the unfinished picture as a matter of course. These sketches and starts and mere indications no longer startle or shock on the walls of museums or galleries. But will our grandchildren find them sufficiently interesting to let them remain there?

To put a high value on the unfinished picture was to set a most insidious temptation in the way of painter and student. Since, admittedly, a distinguished start was a more interesting thing than an unsuccessfully labored picture, why not just make starts and let them go at that? This is just what almost an entire generation of painters proceeded to do. Their teachers, or at least the best of them, had struggled to push their pictures to just as high a degree of finish as they could without "losing them," to use the jargon of the time. And these teachers, or at least the best of them, had tried to instill a similar attitude in their pupils. But the majority of these pupils followed the line of least resistance. This was the more natural as almost none of them had received a good training in drawing. So they proceeded to flood the world with a huge output of "starts," because it was all they had learned how to do. When in time it became their turn to teach, inevitably they could only show their pupils how to make "starts." Now, as I have tried to show, the difference between a good "start" and a bad "start" is only perceptible to the professional painter who has learned from experience to recognize certain fundamental aspects of appearance. There is no reason why the layman should be able to differentiate between the two, though his reaction to a finished rendering is usually a very sound one. But when pictures were reduced to "starts" he lost his trust in his chief criterion of judgment, his common sense. The painters' indifference to completeness worked in the same way as their indifference to

the subjects of their pictures. It eliminated something that the average man did care about and was, up to a point, able to appreciate. In the case of the subject matter he was forced to accept a point of view which was not his own. The unfinished picture presented him with a form of execution he could not understand. These partially executed canvases, he was told, were "painter's pictures" and he again was asked to accept the painter's judgments of them. Once again he was taking painting on faith, often against his better judgment. This is always an unwholesome circumstance for both painter and public. It was peculiarly unfortunate in this case owing to the enormous increase in the number of incompetent painters. The opinion that the layman accepted as "professional" was more than likely not the opinion of trained painters at all. And so it was that the cult of the incomplete picture, which had a perfectly logical and a perfectly honest origin, prepared the way for the acceptance of the absurd cults that were to follow. Its particular effect was to inure the public to incomprehensible execution.

In discussing these three popular misconceptions of the nature of impressionist painting I have aimed to give the reader a clearer idea of what that painting really was. The first misconception, that the impressionists' purpose is to make a factual statement of everything they see, shows a complete lack of understanding of their pictures. The second misconception, that the emphasis of the impressionist painter was placed on the idiosyncrasies of his personal vision, is a distortion of an essential element in their doctrine. The third view, which identifies impressionism with rapid and summary notation, is to some extent justified by the practice of certain impressionist painters. Each of the last two interpretations of impressionist practice has been widely accepted by large groups of painters and, each in its different way, has done incalculable harm to the development of painting.

But the greatest harm to painting resulting from the impressionist movement was directly due to the bad teaching to which it gave a semblance of justification. It is the character of this teaching which we will now briefly consider.

CHAPTER VIII

Considerations on Impressionist Teaching

They put a crayon in our hands when we are seven or eight years old. We begin to draw from models of eyes, mouths, noses, ears, then of feet and hands. For a long period our backs are bent over our portfolios in front of the Hercules or the Torso and you have not seen the tears brought on by this Satyr, this Gladiator, this Venus de Medici, this Antaeus.... After we have spent days and worked nights by lamplight before stationary and inanimate forms they confront us with life and, suddenly, the labor of all the preceding years seems to count for nothing.... One must teach the eye to see nature, and how many have not seen it and never will! It is the torment of our lives. We are kept working five or six years from the living model before they turn us over to our own genius, if we have any....He who has not realized the difficulties of this art does in it nothing worth while.

CHARDIN (*translated and abridged from a speech made before the Académie*)

I would rather have painted four bladders and a palette, as did Chardin, than the Entrance of Alexander into Babylon of LeBrun, the official painter of Louis XIV.

ALFRED STEVENS

I HAVE headed this chapter with Chardin's description of the training to which he was subjected in his boyhood to point out the contrast between the teaching dispensed by impressionist painters of our time with that on which the greatest impressionist painter of the eighteenth century founded his own art. The impressionist movement of the nineteenth century itself produced much fine painting and disclosed previously unsuspected material for the use of artists. It added considerably to the technical resources of their craft. By directing the attention of painters to the subtlest manifestations of color, of light, and of atmosphere, it greatly enlarged the known possibilities of painting. And, by reasserting the necessity of the painter's direct approach to nature, it gave new vitality to a then somewhat stagnant art. But this same impressionist movement was largely responsible, directly as well as indirectly, for that collapse of painting as an art which my generation has witnessed. I

have alreday indicated several of the factors which contributed to bring about this result.

It was through their presentation to art students that impressionist principles did the greatest damage. This was due in part to the elusive nature of these principles. It was due in a very large measure to the adoption of the art-school, or art-class, system of teaching at about the time when the impressionist method of painting became the generally accepted one. One of the most difficult methods to explain, one of the most personal of all approaches to painting, the teaching of which demands the greatest understanding of the individual needs of each student worthy of being taught at all, perhaps less than any other way of painting was this one susceptible of being taught under art-school conditions. Because of these conditions the sound precepts of the earlier teachers were warped in transmission and crystallized in slightly distorted form or were given an application for which they were not originally intended. A large part of the teaching that is being dispensed today, wherever any pretense is still being made to teach painting as such, is drawn from this body of not wholly understood precepts, further denatured by subsequent transmissions. The painters in whom the ideas originated would, if they were alive, be the first to deny them in their present-day form.

I propose now to discuss one or two of the most maleficent of these principles of recent art teaching that owed their origin to impressionism. These principles in their original application were admirable. Probably all of the men who first gave the principles currency in America understood these original applications, but they seem to have been unable to make them clear to the majority of their students. The greater number of painters teaching after, let us say, the year 1920, had themselves acquired only a very limited technical equipment. In some few cases this equipment was sufficient for their own needs and enabled them to produce good work. But it was not adequate to make them good teachers. In their attempt to meet the requirements of their students they gave their own methods a wider scope than these methods were able to meet. The sincerity of some of these men is above suspicion. Their judgment may have been at fault. Their inadequacy to the task of teaching is demonstrated by the work of their pupils. And the evil that they taught lives after them, for some of the misapprehensions born of their teaching are now accepted as fundamental truths.

Of all the separate elements of the painter's craft drawing has always been recognized as the most essential and certainly one of the most difficult of acquisition. For that reason the great teachers of painting and the great teaching traditions have never failed to put drawing first in the student's curriculum. It is very questionable whether it is possible to draw with anything approaching distinction, or even moderate correctness, unless study has been begun early in life under a good teacher. This is much less true of the other elements of painting. If a man can really draw I do not believe he would have great difficulty in learning to paint adequately in middle life, provided,

of course, he had natural aptitude. But there is small likelihood that even a very talented man could acquire more than a halting form of draftsmanship if his training started later than his teens or, at least, his very early twenties. There are certainly very few cases on record that can be cited against this view. The experience of centuries has shown that the painter cannot be started drawing too early nor be trained too thoroughly in that art. As far as I know it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that any serious painter professing to prepare earnest young men to be professional painters ever soft-pedaled the overwhelming importance of drawing and the absolute necessity of a careful grounding in drawing as the very basis of their training.

But the twentieth century was to witness the phenomenon of painters who instilled in their students a very different attitude toward drawing, an attitude which did, however, have a perfectly logical origin in the impressionist concept of painting. It is this logical origin that I wish to bring to the reader's attention, as well as the fallacy that was bound up with it. Had the virtual discarding of drawing from the student's curriculum—for to study drawing with anything but the most wholehearted intensity is tantamount to not studying it at all—been due solely to ignorance on the part of the teachers and to its appeal to the laziness of the student I do not think it would have been so widely accepted at the start. A purely negative attack would have failed to destroy a principle so firmly established by the experience of the ages. What made a tremendous appeal to the students was that the new teaching appeared to substitute a fresh, superior, and vastly more attractive way of learning to draw for the old, severely laborious one. Nothing can better illustrate this attitude than a quotation from the life of William Merrit Chase by Katharine Metcalf Roof (1911). It deals with the early years of Chase's teaching in New York shortly after 1878.

Irving Wiles distinctly remembers his first criticism, which is interesting because it is an example of the thing Chase meant to American students at that time. Trained in the careful methods of the academic art school of that period, Wiles said he looked with scorn that first day upon the charcoal drawings of the students about him. To his eye they seemed rough and careless, so he took out his little hard crayon, whittled it to the finest point, and began to show what careful and accurate work he could do. What was his surprise, when Chase came along to criticize, to see him look with disapproval upon his work, "No, that isn't the idea," said Chase, "Give me your charcoal. Something more like this." And he proceeded to draw, only with infinitely more skill, in the rough and unfinished manner of his pupils. After this Wiles said he did not let his master see any more of his work until he had mastered the trick. But at his next criticism he believes

that Chase did not recognize him as the careful manipulator of the pointed crayon.

The only trouble with the new method was that it did not work. It did not work because it did not sufficiently take into consideration the difficulty of learning to draw for all but the most exceptional student. Unfortunately the new ideas did suffice to undermine the belief in the old disciplines.The result has been the virtual disappearance, in America at least, of anything that could be called real draftsmanship.

What we call drawing is a convention used to represent the shapes of things on a flat surface. These shapes we indicate most readily by means of the outlines where-with we bound them. Now things as we see them in nature are not surrounded by outlines. The outline we make is a purely conventional means of representation with no basis in reality. But this convention provides us with an admirable way of stating certain facts about the thing represented. These facts are chiefly connected with its shape, its structure, and its volume. In its higher forms drawing is not only able to record such facts but also to record the draftsman's attitude toward these facts. Drawing, as such, necessarily separates these particular facts from another set of facts which it ignores. These latter, such as color, atmosphere, texture, values, belong to the province of painting.

Now the particular facts with which drawing concerns itself are intensely interesting to the artist and are a very important part of all representation. They are also extremely difficult for the untrained eye to register with any sort of correctness. When they have to do with anything as complex and expressive as the human body they justify a lifetime of study. To some artists these facts of form seem more important and more interesting than any other facts. Such men are often content to devote their entire lives to drawing and in their paintings they only add such color as will enhance the drawing. But no artist who makes representation a part of his means of expression can afford to slight these facts. If he does not deal with them adequately his representation will look grotesque. And the ability to handle form adequately comes only from long study.

In painting the convention of an outline is no longer necessary, as it is possible to represent objects much as they appear in nature by juxtaposed areas of color. Interest in form has led some painters to introduce outlines into their paintings. A more frequent use of outline in painting is to emphasize the silhouette of the objects outlined. This can considerably enhance the decorative quality of a picture, one of the greatest of decorative elements being derived from the patterns and arabesques made by such silhouettes. But an outline can only be introduced at some sacrifice of atmospheric effect.

"The fact that there is no such thing as an outline in nature is sufficient reason for using one in art," was an apothegm that recently had considerable vogue in cer-

tain art circles. It probably originated in a distaste aroused by the prevailing impressionist art teaching. Or it may merely indicate a strong preference for the decorative forms of painting over the forms based on the study of appearances, such as impressionism. As quoted, the statement has no valid meaning whatever. Unfortunately, it is just this sort of obscurantist dictum, with its seeming profundity and its suggestion of iconoclasm, that has a great fascination for art students today.

It is one of the basic principles of impressionism to deny the validity of representing objects by surrounding them with an outline. Some of the caustic comments by which older painters sought to bring home this principle to beginners became classic. Joseph DeCamp[1] told me that he, when a young student, once showed Whistler a painting representing the profile of an old woman. DeCamp had indicated the edge of this profile with a dark outline. Whistler turned to him with a snicker and asked, "What did you put a shoestring around the old lady's face for? Did she have one there?"

Undeniably objects do not appear so surrounded in nature. They appear as colored areas bounded by other areas into which they merge or from which they stand out more or less sharply. For a picture to convey the particular sense of beauty and of mystery which we experience when we look at nature itself, it is essential to render these areas just as they appear to the eye, both as to shape, color, and degree of definition. To surround them with a line is to introduce a disturbing element which completely destroys the very quality the impressionist painter is laboring to create. In describing the general procedure of impressionist painting I have pointed out its logical tendency to leave the exact definition of shapes to a late stage of the work. To painters who felt that the impressionist attitude was the only valid one for an artist—and that is the way most painters did feel at the beginning of this century—there was a logic in the view that the study of drawing as a separate accomplishment was unnecessary, or even harmful to the student. "If you can get all your colored areas of the right shape and in the right place," some of them said, "your picture will be drawn right."

This is true in the abstract, no doubt. That is to say, a painter who is already a fine draftsman and has a highly developed sense of form can make his shapes out of smears of paint without any preparatory outlines.[2] In so doing he is carrying out a number of very complex operations at once, attending simultaneously to his shapes, his values, his color, and the composition of his picture. To do this successfully requires a high degree of skill in each one of these departments. But the teachers of whom I speak went further than advocating this as a method of painting. They fostered the idea that the knowledge and skill to handle these various things could be acquired in a single process by the student.

In the earlier days of impressionist teaching the old practice still persisted of

[1] Plates 56 and 63.

[2] E.g., Plate 57.

making students draw for a long period before they were allowed to paint at all. Under this system the student, when he started to paint, was already a competent draftsman, theoretically at least. And for a really competent draftsman the method of painting I have described has a good deal in its favor. But competent draftsmen are rare, even among students who have worked long and assiduously in a drawing class. And with the passing years less and less stress was placed on these preliminary studies. Finally the theory emerged triumphant that they were unnecessary and that the student could be set at once to painting, thereby avoiding the contaminating influence of the nonexistent outline and of the black and white values said to be detrimental to the color sense. A seeming authority was given this theory by the fact that there are very few drawings by Velasquez in existence. Since Velasquez drew magnificently in paint and had seemingly made no drawings (or next to none) it followed that one could learn to draw in paint without making drawings. A new method of teaching was evolved. I do not think I need add that it was given short shrift by all the painters of the day who knew anything about drawing.[1]

I well remember a conversation I had, as a very young student, with one who, in his middle twenties, was acting as assistant instructor to the master. We all considered him at the time to have "arrived," and that was also his own view of the case. He told me that he regretted the months he had spent in the study of drawing. If he could have lived his life over again, he said, he would have scrupulously avoided any work in black and white, but would have started immediately to paint. Unfortunately, that summer was to be the peak of his artistic career. When I met him again, years later, an incompetent failure as a painter, I did not have the heart to ask him if he had changed his mind.

To the majority of students the idea was extraordinarily attractive. The serious study of form is an austere pursuit. The old system of making it a necessary preliminary to painting had the additional merit of frightening away the less earnest students. This was of great benefit to the serious ones, though it made the classes less remunerative. Color, on the other hand, makes an immediate appeal to almost any one possessed of the slightest flair for painting. Genuine distinction in color is as difficult of attainment as distinction in drawing or design. But the not too exacting pursuit of color values, color relations, tonalities, and what not, can be made very delightful. The vagueness of these names and the elusive character of the qualities

[1] The great painter Alfred Stevens, himself an admirable draftsman, makes the following statement in his little book entitled *Impressions on Painting* (translated by Charlotte Adams): "The student should learn to draw, as much as possible, with the brush."

From such a source this statement should carry great weight. But it leaves open the question how much it is possible for a student to learn to draw only with a brush. Obviously drawing with a brush is a very important part of his training. But the experience of the last fifty years should make one skeptical as to his eventual progress unless he has also made very serious studies with a point. Stevens certainly does not say these should be omitted.

they were intended to designate gave their study a special charm. As they were qualities only perceptible to the initiated, the student felt his efforts to capture them were beyond the criticism of the mere layman. This sense of superiority was established in the first few weeks of attendance at the art class. The new principle of teaching assured the financial success of any art class which adopted it. It did more than that. It made of the austere and inaccessible art of painting a fascinating hobby within easy reach of anyone with a taste for it and enough money to pay tuition and buy materials. The virtual elimination of the serious study of drawing as a prerequisite to the study of painting made possible the present-day popularity of art as a pursuit. Once it was firmly established, the number of art students and of self-styled artists increased with tremendous rapidity. No other profession made as few demands on the intelligence or capacity of the individual as painting in the new acceptation. Few forms of activity offered equal opportunities for self-deception to its practitioners. The consequence was that "taking up painting" has become the most widely popular avenue of escape from reality for the maladjusted, the incompetent, and the misfits. The elimination of anything resembling real drawing as a prerequisite to the study of painting and its absence in the "modern" concept of painting made possible the immense vogue of painting as a hobby, a pastime, and a pseudo profession mentioned in the early pages of this book as one of the peculiar characteristics of our era.

A painter of distinction who was teaching in one of the best known art schools in the country from about 1912 until about 1930 has told me that he was continuously amazed by the change in the type of student attending the school during the course of those years. When he began to teach, the general level of the students seemed to him markedly inferior to that of his own student days. But, during the years that he taught, there was a steady decline in the caliber of the students in respect to their talent, their general intelligence, and their personality. I think most painters who have been in a position to observe art students during the last twenty or thirty years have made similar observations.

The complete deterioration of our knowledge and our standards of draftsmanship is the most disastrous of all the sequelae of the nineteenth-century impressionist movement. It started from a new approach to a difficult problem presented in all seriousness by well-intentioned painters. They are less to blame for the error of judgment which led them to adopt it than for their inability to abandon the idea as they observed its unfortunate effect in the work of the pupils. The method of teaching devised by these painters failed because the ability to draw cannot be acquired except by the most diligent and concentrated study. A real sense of form can only be developed through long training. They should have recognized this after a few years of teaching, for any relaxation in a painter's attitude toward drawing may lead to disaster. "Drawing," runs the thrice-famous dictum of Ingres, "is the probity of art."

In art, as in other fields of human activity, it is excessively dangerous to compromise with probity.

Of course, by no means all those who taught the impressionist method of painting accepted this extreme attitude toward the study of form. On the contrary, a goodly number of painters made a valiant stand against it. But, from the very start, the popularity of the new method was against them. Presently those who had been trained in this method became teachers themselves. To these latter the new doctrine had the authority inherent in most ideas received during the formative years of our lives. Furthermore, this generation of artists was for the most part lacking in any real perception of drawing, owing to their own defective training in that respect. Their own pupils have in turn demonstrated the same attitude and the same defects, still further intensified. The results are now patent for all to see. They will become more evident as the passage of time shows that most of the painting being done today, which still seems to many novel and interesting, is merely incompetent and blundering.

A teaching which failed to develop ability to draw, which confused rather than clarified the treatment of values and modeling, which slighted composition and ignored the ultimate goal of the artist, picturemaking, had little to offer to young men setting out to be professional painters. It was a teaching virtually reduced to cryptic aphorisms and "pep talks," interspersed with sarcastic attacks on the various forms of painting alien to the ever narrowing outlook of the individual teachers. Some of this teaching has been put into book form. These collections of aphorisms and fragments of class criticisms were sometimes put together under the master's supervision, or, more frequently, were written up after his death by devoted pupils. It is hard to resist the temptation to quote bits from these anthologies, but to do so would inevitably give offense to many earnest souls who spent happy hours in the studios of these popular teachers. The student who is curious to discover what passed for teaching in those studios will find the books on the shelves of the public libraries. This sort of teaching did, and still does, make a strong appeal to the amateur mind. Unfortunately it often appeals for a brief period to many whose talents and clear-headed artistic outlook would enable them to become painters, once given a sound training. These students have often discovered too late that the intriguing maxims and the artistic mysticism of the art class did not in the long run equip them for painting pictures. It is little to be wondered at if the view spread that attendance at an art school was unnecessary to a painter's development. Under such conditions it very likely is.

Impressionist art-school teaching gave currency to a view the exaggeration of which struck at the very principle of art teaching. This was the cult of the "naïve point of view," of the "innocent eye." And this, like the other destructive elements of impressionist doctrine, originated in a perfectly sound idea.

The idea was that we are prevented from recognizing the true aspects of what we see by certain preconceptions having their origin chiefly in our verbal education. We think of snow as white, for instance, and so when we look across a snowy landscape we are unaware of the blue tones which the sky reflects into the shadows and of the rosy or golden tints which the sun imparts to the lights. We are only conscious of the general aspect of whiteness, which long association has led us to expect from snow. It is the theoretical contention of the impressionists that the little child, innocent of such conventional association, perceives the aspects of the world about him as they really are, not as we have come to assume they are through our acceptance of stereotyped concepts. The impressionist painter seeks to recapture that pristine and unbiased view of the world which he believes, theoretically, to be the possession of the child or of the untutored savage. I have no means of judging the correctness of this estimate of infantile or primitive visual processes, as both infant and savage lack adequate means for communicating their reactions of this sort. Nor would I care to say how seriously and literally this view was taken by the intelligent painters who expounded it in an effort to make clear to their pupils the elusive character of visual experience. Taken as a sort of parable it admirably illustrates a vitally important principle of painting.

An insistence on the artist's direct perception of what he sees has probably been a part of all good art teaching. Certainly the idea is implicit in the entire development of European painting from the time of Giotto. Though we find this insistence expressed almost in the language of today in fragments of David's teaching that have come down to us, the impressionists accused academic teaching in their own day of warping the vision of art students so unfortunate as to come under its influence. I think I have sufficiently emphasized the fact that the first-rate academic teachers did insist on a very direct observation indeed of many aspects of nature and that they regarded the study of classic forms merely as additional elements of the painter's equipment. Nevertheless the impressionist painters' misunderstanding of the so-called academic concept of painting gave them some grounds for their accusation, grounds which were fully justified by the bad teaching of certain third-rate academic schools.

Imbued with this idea, the teachers of the impressionist point of view stressed and overstressed the evil inherent in using any formula or receipt or convention in rendering the appearance of nature. In their desire to force the student to express his own vision of what was before him these teachers minimized the value of any working method and deliberately avoided all reference to sound and effective procedures for laying on paint or manipulating pigment. If questioned about these matters they generally evaded the question. "It doesn't matter how you put on your paint," they would say, "as long as you put down the right color in the right place." They fell back on this half-truth as on a sort of moral principle which would have a tonic effect on the student. The best painters at the turn of the century were fine workmen themselves and some of them achieved a very beautiful paint quality. But they concealed their own way of work from their students as parents conceal sophisticated books from growing children, believing it unwholesome for students to be preoccupied with handling. As a result a generation of painters grew up wholly insensitive to fine workmanship, unable to achieve it and affecting to scorn it. Their point of view and their ignorance prepared the way for the grotesquely clumsy handling we see in so much modern work.

The belief in the superiority of the "naïve" approach to painting first militated against the teaching of the academicians, but it presently provided a basis for attacking all teaching of any kind.

Today the application of this view seems to have reached its extreme limits. Among the esthetically advanced, knowledge, skill, fine workmanship, even a moderate degree of competence are considered detrimental to the work of art. The most inept and grotesque performances are praised as delightfully naïve and fresh in point of view. And the culmination of this attitude is to be seen in presenting the paintings of children, of semi-illiterates, and even of the insane, as works of art. This is one of the most logical, as it is the most revealing, of all the manifestations of modern painting.

The present total disintegration of the art of painting is surely a strange outcome for a movement that originated in such sound ideas and so earnest an endeavor. Obviously the nineteenth-century impressionist movement is not solely responsible for this collapse. The most important factors of all are hidden in the deep psychic and emotional forces of our epoch which have manifested themselves in literature and music as well. The lunatic fringes of music and of literature are probably not very different in character and value from the extreme examples of modern painting. But a healthy element has persisted in both music and literature, carrying on the technical tradition and making successful use of material suggested by the most typically contemporaneous developments. I believe there are composers who can write music with great skill and knowledge. Certainly the ability to write the English language has not been lost. But the language of painting has actually been lost. There is no one living today who has more than a limited ability in this field, and the handful of men who are in possession of even that limited ability are mostly old. It was the disintegrating effect of badly taught impressionist ideas that loosened the structure of painting and prepared the way for this all but total destruction.

CHAPTER IX

The Double Heritage

... those of us who believe that there is no result without means, that the important thing is not what the artist feels but what he expresses, and that all expression must be by technical methods so that there is no good art which is not technically good.

KENYON COX

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS I have tried to clarify, and in a measure to reconcile, two different approaches to the problems of representation. I have necessarily oversimplified the contrast between the two approaches and, by labeling the one impressionist and the other academic, I have risked making the entire matter seem a local issue between two groups of painters now long since dead and buried. But a genuine understanding of these two conceptions of picturemaking is of great importance to the prospective painter. Today this understanding has been made difficult by much that has been written and taught in the recent past. Obviously the art student will not study these ways of painting in order to paint pictures similar to those painted in the nineteenth century. Still less will he seek to combine the mutually incompatible qualities of the two schools. But between them these two schools hold the key to a very great part of the accumulated knowledge needful for the making of pictures. And the intelligent and talented student cannot fail to be intensely eager to acquire that knowledge.

In referring to these two traditions I have again and again spoken of them as "approaches to painting." For a painter's training does not consist primarily in instruction as to the handling of his materials. Such knowledge is extremely important, of course, but it is not the main thing. The essential purpose of a painter's training should be to equip him with the means of solving any problem suggested to him by his creative impulse. The nature of these problems varies with each individual and, for the same individual, varies from time to time. But it is characteristic of the painter that his creative impulse finds expression in pictures, that is, in things that address themselves to the visual sense. The painter creates by combining elements taken from the visible world. A sound tradition of painting is, perhaps more than anything else, an attitude toward the visible world, and its teaching seeks to make that world more understandable and more accessible to its disciples. It might be said that, where painting is concerned, the main purpose of all good teaching is to establish a direct relationship between the student and what he sees. Secondarily, it is to give him a means of

expressing his reaction to that relationship. It is characteristic of bad teaching to give the student ready-made interpretations of natural appearances and recipes for rendering them. This sort of teaching justifies the use of the term academic in the most derogatory sense of the word. It is the typical teaching of the second-rate teacher (which is not necessarily the same thing as the second-rate painter) in all schools and in all places. A genuine painting tradition can only point the way toward an approach to painting, just as a genuine ethics only points the way toward an approach to the conduct of life. When either crystallizes into a set of hard and fast rules the result is a sterile pedantry in the one case and an intolerant bigotry in the other.

It is sometimes argued that the older methods are unsuited to the expression of the ideas and emotions with which modern artists are concerned. Of course they are. Every generation, in some measure every artist, has to create the language suitable for a particular message. Our era has presented the contemporary painter with a wealth of new material for his art. The progress of science, especially in the field of psychology, has deeply altered our conceptions of man and of his place in the universe. Our attitude toward the cultures of the past has been greatly changed and renovated by the researches of anthropology. The amazing discoveries of recent years have conjured up a vision of the future which we fill with radiance or with terror according to our individual temperaments. And the agonies and horror which our generation has witnessed have exacerbated our emotional sensibilities to a high pitch. These, and many other things, are factors which deeply affect the emotions that color the artistic creative impulse. To many artists these influences are inescapable, nor would they seek to escape them if they could. They wish to give an enduring artistic form to their reaction to the bewildering, tragic, and portentous world in which they live. In the field of literature they have been frequently successful. I am not competent to hazard an opinion on what has been done in music. In painting they have failed so far.

The failure of the painters is due to their inability to give this emotional material a pictorial form of any distinction or even adequacy. The two great elements which give pictures lasting value are pattern and representation. For the past five hundred years painters in the European tradition have aimed at representation of a very complete sort and a high artistic standard has been established in this respect. The student of today may feel that this sort of representation is too complete for his purposes. He may desire a form more simplified, eliminating all but essentials. And he may be right. But there is little chance that he will simplify intelligently and effectively, or that he will know what to eliminate, until he has first trained his perceptions by learning to make a complete presentation of the facts. For centuries this principle has been part of the wisdom of the studios. It has been amply corroborated by the shortcuts of which our "Modern" painters have shown us the results.

The only hope of rebuilding the art of painting lies in a return to the study of the

appearances of nature. It has been the basis of every revival of that art since it was first practiced. It will always be so in the future. The study of nature and of its appearances is the very Fountain of Life from which painting draws its sustenance. As the limbs of the giant Antaeus lost their strength whenever he was separated from his Mother Earth so is the art of painting doomed to artificiality and monotony whenever artists abandon the study of nature.

Once again I am stating a principle with which there will probably be agreement in virtually all quarters of the art world. As in most questions pertaining to painting disagreement begins only when we come to practical applications. And it is the way in which this principle is applied to the workaday problems of painting that is important. I imagine that every art student, down to the most woolly-minded, holds to the view that nature is the source from which he is going to derive knowledge and inspiration. I gather that every self-styled painter, including the most inept, believes himself a profound student of nature. But the failure of most art students to become even third-rate painters and the failure of most painters today to produce anything but weak imitations of the mannerisms of other painters who have themselves derivative styles is clear proof that, in order to bear fruit, the study of nature requires more than a statement of good intentions.

The crux of the matter is that it requires vastly more than that. The ability to read even a very little in Nature's infinite book of secrecy is not something a man can acquire by himself. One might as well expect a savage on some island hitherto unknown to civilized man to discover unaided the principles of modern surgery. This would imply his being able first to invent and construct the instruments which it took centuries to perfect. It would imply his being able in his own lifetime to discover the scientific facts accumulated by generations of investigators. It would imply his also having time to develop by a system of trial and error a surgical technique which he could learn in a few years at a medical school. And it would imply a number of things besides. The bright young man who believes he can, unaided by the experience of the great painters of the past, study and interpret nature for himself is attempting a less vital, but scarcely less difficult, task.

In theory the task is, of course, attractive. It has all the fascination of a fresh adventure, of a voyage of discovery untrammeled by the supervision of masters full of wise saws and modern instances. Success, which seems just around the corner, will be all the more dazzling because it will have been achieved unaided. And, above all, the art evolved so independently is sure to be wholly original in character. Such a program is necessarily fascinating to the young at any time. In the past few years it has become irresistibly so, owing to the added backing of painters who seem to be leaders in their profession.

Fortunately the student today, and in the future, can profit by the experience of this immediate past. It is now abundantly proved that these self-trained, or virtually

self-trained, men have acquired no ability to express themselves. So little are they able to do so that we cannot tell whether or not they have anything to express. And the most striking thing about their method of expression, after its incompetence, is its lack of originality. The representation of these painters is a conglomeration of tricks taken from other painters, frequently no more original or competent than themselves. Those who doubt this statement have but to go to an exhibition of Modern paintings and examine pictures. The subject matter may or may not be unusual. But the execution he will find, in practically every case, is crudely derived from some other painter or from the technique of the nursery. This is not only an observable fact, but it is the inevitable outcome of an effort to paint without first establishing an approach to the firsthand study of nature. Once the student has arrived at a full understanding of this he will be in a better position to prepare himself for his chosen profession than were his immediate predecessors by whose failures he will have profited.

He will realize that what he must learn from the experience of the centuries is how to study nature. He will realize that therein lies the secret of the masters. He will realize that the great teachers have tried to show their students a way of using nature as a source of supplies, so to speak, and then how to put those supplies to uses of their own. And he will realize the futility and hopelessness of trying to do without the wisdom of the past.

It is at this point in the evolution of his thought that I would direct his attention to the two great nineteenth-century traditions I have discussed at such length. Let him firmly grasp the idea that he should not study these traditions separately, but together, that they should not be considered as conflicting, but as mutually complementary. So considered they will constitute probably the best available basis upon which he may, if he is sufficiently gifted, build a method of his own that is adequate to express the particular message he carries in his heart. And it is earnestly to be hoped that, whenever again any painter is so fortunate as to have a genuine command of the art of painting, he will spare no pains to pass on his knowledge to the talented young men of his time.

CHAPTER X

The Plight of the Young Painter Today

N'est-ce pas assez pour le tourment d'un véritable artiste de savoir qu'il arrivera à la dernière heure sans avoir dit ce qu'il voulait? [1]

JEAN PAUL LAURENS

Should any student, therefore, happen to be present who has taken up the art on the supposition of finding it an easy and amusing employment—anyone who has been sent to the Academy by his friends on the idea that he may cheaply acquire an honorable and profitable profession—anyone who has mistaken a petty kind of imitative, monkey talent for genius—anyone who hopes by it to get rid of what he thinks a more vulgar or disagreeable situation, to escape confinement at the counter or the desk—anyone urged merely by vanity or interest, or, in short, impelled by any consideration but a real and unconquerable passion for excellence—let him drop it at once and avoid these walls and everything connected with them as he would the pestilence; for if he have not this unquenchable liking, in addition to all the requisites above enumerated, he may pine in indigence, or skulk through life as a hackney likeness taker, a copier, a drawing master, or pattern drawer for young ladies, or he may turn picture cleaner, and help time to destroy excellencies which he cannot rival—but he must never hope to be, in the proper sense of the word, a painter.

JOHN OPIE: *Lectures before the Royal Academy*

THE PERVADING CHARACTERISTIC of contemporary painting is its fundamental technical incompetence. And yet this very fact, which one would suppose to be blatantly manifest to any observer, is not only far from being generally accepted but an opposite view of the case is upheld by a large number of amateurs and writers on art. I am not here concerned with the group who believe that the so-called technical elements of painting are positively detrimental to artistic expression, who feel that these serve only to becloud the spirit which is the essence of the work of art, and who, consequently, consider that the present ignorance of and indifference

[1] Is it not sufficient torment for a true artist to know he will come to his last hour without having expressed what he wanted to express?

to the means by which painters have heretofore achieved their effect is a happy indication of artistic regeneration. Their position is at least logical and is based on a correct estimate of the technical proficiency of their protagonists. But the case is dangerously distorted by those who claim skill, and even virtuosity, for men whose knowledge of all the phases of the art of painting is so rudimentary as to be virtually nonexistent, by any standard accepted prior to the war of 1914—taking that event as a convenient landmark for dating a trend which started before it and which did not attain full momentum until some years after it.

All through my professional life the inadequacy of my own technical equipment has been a constant source of distress to me. By technical equipment I mean those elements of a painter's ability which can, and must, be acquired through conscious effort, as distinguished from the aptitudes which are inborn. These latter, which we usually define as talent, intelligence, personality, taste, and similar qualities, the painter can do comparatively little about. Such as they are, he holds them as his birthright and they are his to make the most of by cultivating them to the best of his ability. But the most gifted man will hardly achieve even mediocrity in painting until his natural gifts have been subjected to a long discipline and until he has acquired a large amount of specialized knowledge. Conversely, a man of seemingly moderate native talents may very well supplement these through his own efforts and produce work of genuine distinction. It is of the utmost importance that the prospective painter should appreciate these facts while he is still very young and consequently still in a position to make the most of what he has got. Unfortunately for him, the fashion of the present day is to ignore the lessons of the past in this regard and to consider the ability to paint an inborn gift which should be left to develop by itself. This view would now seem to be justified by the great reputations acquired in recent years by certain painters quite unhampered by a knowledge of the art of painting. But, before the point may be considered proved, it will be necessary for these reputations to withstand the test of time. The young artist who is satisfied to paint as incompetently as these celebrities is staking his career on the assumption that bad painting can withstand this test. He will be wise to bear in mind that, so far in history, it never has.

Now, while the mature painter should not be held responsible for his natural endowments, he is very responsible indeed for the development he has managed to give them. He would be entirely responsible were it not that the extremely complex art of painting must be learned under a teacher who is himself a competent painter as well as one able to analyze his own competence and impart it to others. The man, however gifted, who has not been able to study under such a teacher during his formative years will never do full justice to his gifts and, unless these latter are very remarkable indeed, he will be a failure as a painter. There have been a few first-rate painters who pass for having been self-taught, but in most of these cases the evidence

for the fact is inconclusive. In any event the list is a tiny one. The history of painting records that the overwhelming majority of painters, including the very greatest, worked long years under competent teachers. But an artist cannot be held to blame if, during his adolescent years, he found no such teacher available. And, unfortunately, the young student is rarely able to judge between good and bad teaching. It is only much later, when it is too late, that he realizes that he has been misled. In middle life, when he perceives that his failure is due, not to lack of effort and assiduous study on his part, but to the absence of a proper direction having been given to those efforts by the older men to whom he once went for counsel, his tendency will be to brood with resentment and bitterness over his wasted labor and thwarted hopes. This sort of bitterness I have found to be very common among the serious painters of my generation.

Such dissatisfaction seems to be less widespread in the generations that have followed. It is my impression that most of the younger men are quite unaware that they know very little about painting and that they do it very badly. It is, I repeat, necessary to paint fairly well to acquire a perception of what good painting is and a realization of its enormous difficulty. Perhaps the younger painters of today, very few of whom can by any stretch of the term be said to paint even fairly well, are the happier for that reason. Setting their own standard of excellence, praised by a vociferous group of critics who have as little perception of painting as themselves, and admired by a fairly large public who have dabbled a bit in painting and who paint only slightly worse than the so-called professional artists, it would appear to be a very happy state of affairs. In such a world it may be foolish indeed to complain of the prodigiously poor quality of the work being produced.

But it is one of the remarkable things about man that he will not for long accept the spurious and third-rate, no matter with what sauce of propaganda, fanaticism, or high-pressure salesmanship it be served up to him. Sooner or later he senses the shoddiness of the material and will have no more of it. This is particularly so if he can compare it with something really first-rate. And the masterpieces in our museums remain as a deadly menace to bad painting. Unless these great paintings, which are our heritage, are destroyed or hidden from view, they will themselves destroy the prestige which has been artificially conferred on so many of the pictures touted today. Once that prestige has gone, these works will be seen to be just what they are, namely, badly painted pictures such as almost anybody could paint and almost everybody has painted. It would be absurd to hazard a guess as to how soon to expect this catastrophe, if catastrophe it should be called, but that it will happen sometime is as inevitable as tomorrow.

I have tried to indicate in the preceding pages the confused and fragmentary state to which the great painting traditions have been reduced during the last fifty years. If, in the next few decades, even this fragmentary knowledge is lost, it may take

many generations to reconstruct what was so lightly thrown aside and it is impossible to guess how many men of talent will die without having been able to give to the world what was in them. The preservation and transmission of the knowledge and skill that makes picture painting possible seems to me by all odds the most essential thing to be done for art today. And yet the simple fact is that the individuals and societies who are so active and generous in their efforts to encourage painting are actually contributing to the destruction of the very thing without which painting cannot develop at all. They are, of course, quite unaware that this is what they are doing. But a further discrediting of craftsmanship is the inevitable result of giving so much prominence and praise to the slovenly, the inchoate, the crude, and the clumsy. When such easily produced pictures are hailed with acclaim and hung in resplendent museums of Modern Art only a young man with the stubbornness of a genuine vocation is likely to spend years of drudgery acquiring a skill which, if it is noticed at all, is likely to be met with scorn or derision.

Yet I am convinced that such young men do exist in this country today and that others will follow them. Nature continues and will continue to produce in each generation a very small number of individuals sufficiently endowed to become painters, though their potentialities will only be realized if they can get the training requisite in their art. The craft of painting at the level to which it has now sunk they will recognize as wholly inadequate to their purpose. Their own urge for self-expression will not be gainsaid and yet they will soon realize that they can get little help from the painters who are lauded by their contemporaries. If they go to the museums, and that is one of the things they are certain to do, they cannot fail to perceive that the painters of the past were possessed of a skill and a knowledge these contemporaries lack. They will realize that it is essential that they themselves should acquire a similar skill and a like knowledge if they are to achieve their purpose, though that purpose will be their very own and consequently quite different from that of the earlier artists. The means to express themselves is what they are seeking and these means are embodied in the craft of painting.

The ability to paint a fairly good picture requires a vastly larger amount of specialized information than is generally supposed by people who paint badly and are satisfied with their work. But this information is relatively unimportant in comparison with what painting demands in the way of highly trained perception and skill. Such perception can be trained and this skill acquired only through long years of study under a master who constantly points out to the pupil the differences between his work and the appearances of nature and the differences between his work and that of the great painters whose objectives were similar to his own. Many suppose that these differences are obvious to anyone with an aptitude for painting. The truth is quite the opposite. The clear perception of the subtle factors that enter into good painting only comes to the talented student by dint of constant comparing and analy-

sis under the guidance of a teacher. To the student without a natural aptitude the perception never comes at all, however hard he may strive for it. The sign that a student perceives appears in his ability to execute. The perception is always in advance of the execution but much less so than is generally realized. Only as he begins to draw pretty well himself will the student begin to recognize the difference between good drawing and poor drawing in the work of others. Only as he begins to draw quite well will he sense the qualities that make fine drawing superior to good drawing. I have no way of knowing how drawing may look to a really fine draftsman. Of one thing I am certain, that the fine draftsman perceives things invisible to me and that were invisible to him before he became a fine draftsman. Learning to draw and paint is, more than anything else, a sharpening of certain perceptions, though it is also many other things besides.

Now the experience of several centuries has demonstrated that this education of the student's perceptions is best achieved when a small group of pupils work in close contact with a single highly skilled master. Whenever these contacts become relaxed, through the inclusion of too large a number of students, or because of aloofness and lack of interest on the master's part, or from a decrease in his authority, the effect of his teaching becomes less satisfactory. These principles have been demonstrated again and again throughout the history of painting.

It is well known that, during the great centuries of painting, pupils worked in the studio of their master making their own studies in one part of the establishment while he painted his pictures in another. The students were able to watch the growth of their master's pictures and frequently collaborated on them. There was a constant interchange of ideas of all sorts between master and pupils, and between the pupils themselves. And, not least important, the master had complete control. Any student who did not make satisfactory progress he dismissed. Those who remained qualified themselves as pupils and assistants by dint of industry, skill, and intelligence. Evidence of the sort of craftsmen this system produced can be seen in the picture galleries of the world.

In an earlier chapter I described the academies which emerged in the sixteenth century, prototypes of the modern art school. But throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries painters continued to have studios run on lines established by the apprentice system. In both France and Italy mural decoration had a great vogue, and this sort of painting, by its very nature, requires the collaboration of the artist and his assistants. It was not until the nineteenth century that the atelier system, modeled on David's famous atelier, was substituted for the older method of instruction.

During the first half of the century the Paris ateliers produced excellent results. Each atelier was in charge of a single painter who had complete control over his pupils. He only accepted such of them as seemed to him able to assimilate his teaching. They, on the other hand, had selected their master and came prepared to believe

what he told them. The influence of the teacher made itself strongly felt and he, in turn, was able to watch the development of each individual pupil. The most promising he invited to collaborate on his own pictures. Whatever may be said about the system as such, the point is that, for fifty or sixty years in France, it worked. Several magnificently trained painters were turned out by the ateliers, as well as an astonishing number of very competent ones. At the present time fine workmanship in painting is unrecognized and unsought, but, when once again it comes to be appreciated and enjoyed, many pictures painted in Paris in the middle of the nineteenth century will be rated very highly. It is not impossible that the period will be thought of as constituting one of the high levels in the entire history of European painting. These pictures were painted by men trained in the ateliers during the early years of the century.

But, in the last years of the Second Empire, the effectiveness of these ateliers as centers of teaching began to decline. The Ecole des Beaux Arts was established. The backing of the government, the honors and scholarships accessible to its students, and the free tuition immediately gave the Ecole an ascendancy over the privately taught ateliers. This meant the triumph of the art-school system as we know it, with its diversity of instructors, its rigid curriculum. The ateliers were to continue their own teaching but it became increasingly less effective. Was it because these ateliers were more and more crowded with untalented students as the popularity of painting as a pastime increased? Did the hopelessness of making painters out of such material discourage the teachers? Was it because an idea was spreading among the students that teaching was unnecessary and destroyed individuality? Probably each of these things contributed to the change.

Certain it is that the men who attended the Paris ateliers in the eighties and nineties did not learn their trade as the students of the preceding generations had done. The American students who went to Paris and Munich in the eighties and nineties were to come back and take charge of our own art schools. Men of very considerable skill and knowledge the best of them were. And they were very ready, as is the way of most painters who know their trade and care about it, to pass on that skill and knowledge. But they nearly all appear to have taken it as a matter not open to question that their skill and knowledge could be transmitted to their pupils through the medium of the art school or art class. It is hard to understand how so egregious an error can have been made by such a group. I have known well some of the best of these painters and it was only at the end of their lives, when the complete collapse of the painting tradition was patently seen, that one or two of them admitted that the art-school system might have been at fault. I have heard no painter of that generation intimate that another way of teaching might have been tried. And yet I believe that, if each of these competent painters had made a practice of taking two or three students at a time into his own studio, a nucleus of trained men would have been formed which might have carried the tradition through.

Howard Pyle seems to have been an outstanding exception. He was fully awake to the defects of the art-school system and to the uselessness of the large art class. And he had a deep sense of his obligation toward the deserving students who sought his aid and counsel. In the biography by Charles Abbott are extracts from his letters setting forth his views on the teaching of art which show a penetrating understanding of the problem.

Pyle actually put into effect a scheme whereby he had a selected group of students work with him, charging them only a nominal studio rent and giving his criticisms free. I gather that the system met with an enthusiastic reception from the students, and that he was able to select for teaching those with the sort of talent most sympathetic to him. In this way he exerted an admirable influence over the development of book illustrators.

The art school is so absurd an institution from the point of view of training painters that it seems incredible that intelligent artists should have wasted their energies teaching in them. The art school inevitably is run on a business basis, and, in order to pay for itself or to justify the support of its sponsors, it must attract and keep as large a number of students as possible. More often than not the administration is quite separate from the teaching staff and chooses the instructors for their ability to bring in students rather than for their ability to teach the austere and difficult art of painting. The great majority of students that support the schools have not sufficient natural gifts to become painters at all. Indeed, most of them give up art, wisely enough, after having paid tuition for a few years. In each class there may be, at best, three or four students who would have the makings of painters in them, if given proper instruction.

This they cannot possibly get. In the crowded classes they cannot set up their easels in a proper relation to the model. The slovenly standard of work set by the general level of the students inevitably affects their own work. Twice a week the teacher comes in. The task of criticizing so large a number of students is a formidable one. His average criticism is five minutes per student. In the general confusion he has little opportunity to size up the needs of the few students who really deserve his help. He may not even detect their presence. Only the most general of his ideas get across to the class at all, and those are almost entirely concerned with making transcriptions from the model. The best of the art schools flourishing in the early years of this century did teach that to a certain extent. But how to apply that skill to the subtler problems of picturemaking was not effectively demonstrated to the students. And, the art school being of its very nature what it is, I do not see how such a thing could have been taught there.

Now the best Paris- or Munich-trained painters who taught in these art schools did, as I said before, know a good deal about painting. But, owing to the nature of the art school, this knowledge got over very imperfectly to their pupils. Presently

these pupils found themselves in their turn teaching in the schools. As a result of their own art-school training, they knew very little indeed. Their teaching was reduced to handing out a few catch phrases which they remembered from their own masters, and to making some rapid corrections on the students' work. With all its disadvantages as a means of disseminating knowledge of the complex art of painting, the art school did produce a perfect mechanism for concealing the ignorance of the teachers. The teaching of the third or fourth generation of art-school-trained painters could hardly be called teaching at all. The catch phrases alone remained. Many teachers did not even hazard to correct the work of their pupils, and, indeed, most present-day pupils would, I am told, resent such an impertinence. The art school has now made fully manifest its failure and absurdity as a place to learn the painter's trade, but the wonder is that this was not self-evident from the start.

A theory has been evolved that, in order to teach drawing and painting, it is not necessary that a teacher should be able to draw or paint. This theory, very widely accepted, has been responsible for the frustration of so much potential talent that it requires more than passing mention. Its validity will necessarily depend upon what is meant by good teaching, where drawing and painting are concerned. Many believe that a man who is able to keep up the interest and enthusiasm of his pupils and to give them the feeling that they are "getting ahead" is a good teacher. It is not to be denied that these are useful and attractive qualities for an instructor in any field. But I submit that in the art of painting there is but one sound test of a man's ability to teach. When a painter has attained a high degree of competence in his art and refers to a former teacher as the man to whom he owes that competence, then, and then only, can we be sure that we have a teacher who can teach painting. It is very evident that a student is not immediately aware of whether or not he is getting a sound training. Too frequently the sort of instruction that is leading him into a blind alley seems especially stimulating and attractive. Only when he has become an accomplished painter can he, looking back, correctly estimate the value of the teaching he has received. When an amateurish and incompetent fumbler praises a former teacher such praise may even be interpreted as the severest condemnation. The pupil's failure to learn to paint well is not necessarily the teacher's fault, but it may be. Only a painter who has turned out well-trained painters can with justification be called a good teacher.

Accepting this as the touchstone by which we shall recognize a good teacher of painting, I do not know of a single case on record which justifies the view that a man can teach an element of drawing or painting in which he is himself not competent. It is true that a teacher need not be distinguished as an artist, for a man's artistic stature is determined by many things besides the command of his craft. But it is precisely those additional things which cannot be communicated by a teacher to his pupils. The knowledge and the skill essential to an artist *can* be communicated to the talented. It is to acquire these that a student puts himself under a teacher's guidance.

The student, if he is intelligent, does not go to a teacher to get personality, or inspiration, or ideas for pictures. He may get those from reading poetry, or from symphony concerts, or from walking in the woods, or from his girl. He goes to his teacher to learn his trade. If the teacher is not himself a master of that trade he cannot do much for the student. He is even likely to lead the student into the same errors of procedure that caused his own failure. It is also true that a man may be a thoroughly competent painter and not have the gift of analyzing and imparting his competence. But I do not know of an authentic case of a teacher who has made a pupil proficient in a fundamental element of the painter's craft in which he was himself deficient.

Perhaps I can make clear the reason for this by taking an example from what should be the simplest element of the painter's art for a layman to perceive, *i.e.*, the correct indication of proportions. This is an indispensable part of good drawing. It is immediately evident that the ability to draw the shape of an object, while getting the proportions even fairly correctly, is possessed by rather few people. Those who draw the proportions incorrectly do so because their eyes do not perceive the shape as it actually is. Learning to perceive shapes correctly is the first necessary step to learning how to draw. To some few it comes so rapidly that it seems almost instinctive. But the majority of students have to be trained to compare different areas one with another until a fairly accurate appraisal of their relative sizes becomes ingrained. To many the ability to do this with anything like accuracy never comes. When a person draws incorrectly it is either from intention, from carelessness, or because he sees incorrectly. In the overwhelming majority of cases it is for the last reason, whatever the executant himself or his apologists may say to the contrary. And when he *cannot* draw correctly it is always because he cannot *see* correctly.

Now a person who cannot see correctly cannot teach someone else to see correctly. If he cannot correct the errors of proportion in his own drawings he cannot correct them in the drawings of his pupils. When confronted with their drawings he benefits by having a fresh, unprejudiced eye, which an artist always lacks when he is working on his own drawing. This does enable him to detect errors in the drawings of others which he may not detect in his own until they have been laid aside for several weeks. But if he cannot see correctly enough to draw fairly correctly himself he will only be able to see the grosser errors made by his students. And it will certainly be impossible for him to help the student's vision by making a correct indication on his drawing. If he could not make a correct indication on his own drawing how can he be expected to make a correct indication on the student's? And if the student has no reason to trust his teacher's eye how can he know whether he is drawing more correctly as time goes on or less correctly? The whole supposition that a man who is himself incapable of getting his proportions correctly could in any way aid someone else to do so is so contrary to practical experience, and even to common sense, that one wonders that it ever could be advanced. Thus specifically stated, it

probably never is advanced. It is put in more general terms; "Mr. So-and-so can't draw himself but he is a wonderful teacher of drawing." And, of course, this sort of statement is never made by persons whose work shows any understanding of drawing.

I have chosen perhaps the most obvious element of drawing for my demonstration. But the principle is equally applicable to other elements. If a man draws with a stupid, insensitive line it is because he is not able to perceive sensitively and intelligently the factors that make a line meaningful and interesting. How then can he point out those factors invisible to himself so that the student may become aware of them? If he cannot make values correctly it is because he cannot detect the relative degrees of light and dark contained in various tones. How then can he decide whether the student has correctly stated those degrees? How can he educate the student's eye to perceive things his own eye has not been educated to perceive? It has been, and is being, demonstrated over and over again that he cannot. It would be against all logic should he be able to do so. And yet one hears it continually asserted in certain quarters that he can.

Where the subtler elements of the painter's art are concerned the situation is less clear-cut. There are painters who, though having an excellent command of many of the abilities needful for the making of pictures, are unable to utilize these very effectively in making pictures of their own. Their pictures may be intelligently put together, competently made and skillfully executed, and yet be lacking in artistic interest of a high order. When this is the case the failure of their pictures is usually due to a lack of personality, of imagination, or of taste. More often than not these painters have learned to make the maximum of their limited talents and in so doing have come to a clearer understanding of their own way of working than is always possessed by greater artists who are able to rely on instinct to pull them through. For this reason these makers of reasoned pictures, meticulously thought out and painted with conscious effort, are often excellent teachers. It may well be that they are the best teachers of all. And the very fact that their pupils run no risk of being hypnotized by their facility or brilliant reputations is also an asset.

And yet this, too, is little understood today. Teachers are selected for their success as painters or for the emotional appeal of their pictures, two things which contribute nothing to a painter's teaching ability and which may even exert an unfortunate influence on his pupils.

On the other hand cases are frequently cited of extremely competent painters who lacked the ability to teach. There have undoubtedly been many such and there will be more, when once again there are competent painters. From the fact that a man can be competent and yet lack the ability to impart that competence certain persons have drawn the general conclusion that good painters are bad teachers. The truth is simple enough. Not all good painters are good teachers but all good teachers

are good painters—using the word "painter" in this case to designate a person who has mastered at least some of the elements of the painter's art. It is only those elements which he has mastered that he can teach.

The total collapse in the transmission of knowledge essential to good painting is by all odds the most important of all the factors which established the character of contemporary painting. The adoption of the art-school system at the turn of the century made it impossible for the accomplished painters of that time to train competent pupils able to carry on the great technical traditions and eventually to pass them on to pupils of their own. Meanwhile the schools attracted and kept increasingly large numbers of students wholly unqualified to become painters. These students picked up a few tricks, mannerisms, and axioms which they mistook for the art of painting. These distorted, isolated, and half-understood fragments of a complex art have become the basic principles of the various types of Modern Painting. In the execution of nearly all the pictures today classed as "modern" it is easy to recognize the misapplication of some long-established principle of painting, either too feebly grasped or exaggerated to the point of caricature by the painter. The originality consists in an unabashed flaunting of the artist's inability to achieve the goal for which the principle was devised and in making an artistic virtue of his failure.

Many readers will wonder how, if this be true, this bungling work has received so wide an acclaim. The same conditions that made possible their development also contributed to the seeming success of these types of painting. Anyone who has seen much of art students realizes how completely the vast majority of them accept the authority of the teacher under whom they happen to be studying. If this teacher succeeds, regardless of his method, in making his pupils feel that they are progressing as artists his influence over their outlook becomes overwhelming. It commonly so transcends the ordinary teacher-student relationship, as it exists in other fields, that one is justified in turning to psychiatry for an explanation. Probably the *rapport* established is not dissimilar to what the psychoanalysts call transference when it develops in the emotional attitude of their patients to themselves. However that may be, most art students are fanatical disciples of their teacher and preach his gospel wherever and whenever they find the opportunity. Who of us has not been told by an excited student that Miss Dabble, who taught water colors in some parochial art class, is the leading water colorist in the country? Who has not seen a student's face register scorn when we admit we have never heard of the work of Harry Hokum, under whom she is now studying? Who has not seen a group of young people cross an exhibition, ignoring every other picture, to stand in rapt admiration before the canvas painted by their own master? If they glance at the other pictures at all it is to select for praise only those in which they discover the particular idiosyncrasies which characterize their teacher's work.

Nowadays nearly every family has in it one member who, at one time or another,

has attended some art class. To him or to her the family usually turns whenever any question arises which touches on painting. Quite naturally they accept as final the judgment of the "artistic" member. And so, unconsciously, each such family becomes a cell for the propagation of the ideas on painting which the "artist" picked up in the art class. This peculiar situation provides every crackpot, charlatan, or addlepated amateur who teaches in an art class with a forum and a following. The phenomenon is so common that it is readily observable in any community or group. It is an essential part of the mechanism which has led to the acceptance of so-called Modern Art.

Art schools perform many valuable services in a community. I am not qualified to judge their competence in training students in applied design or the commercial arts. I am prepared to believe they do excellent work along those lines. They also provide an outlet for the activity of innumerable people who find in art a relaxation, a hobby, or an excitement. They offer a great deal to the amateur. But they have failed completely in training professional painters. This failure is inherent in the character of the institution itself. After a trial of forty years and more the art school has proved itself incapable of developing competent painters. Surely the time has come to recognize this fact frankly and to return to a system of teaching capable of fitting our talented young men and women for an arduous and exceptionally difficult profession.

CHAPTER XI

Conclusion

Comment je comprends l'enseignement? Un atelier de cinq ou six élèves, tout au plus, avec un maître qui sache enseigner les éléments de son métier et qui vous mène avec sécurité aux fins de l'art, qui vous aide à comprendre la nature par le musée, qui vous fasse revenir à la nature en sortant du musée.[1]

JULES DALOU

It is austere and profound studies that make great painters and great sculptors; one lives all one's life on this foundation and if it is lacking one will only be mediocre.

J. L. GÉROME

A painter is only great when he is a master workman.

ALFRED STEVENS

A tradition is precise knowledge about the way something has been done in the past; a rich tradition includes knowledge about a great many of the ways that something has been done in the past.

VIRGIL THOMPSON

To ANYONE who has followed the preceding analysis and at the same time carefully examined the execution of pictures painted during the last seventy years, two conclusions must be inescapable.

In the first place, such a reader can hardly fail to realize that many of the characteristics of contemporary pictures, especially those featured today as strikingly "interesting" and "modern," are merely mannerisms resulting from an ignorant misapplication of time-honored principles of painting.

Secondly, he will be unable to ignore the fact that the traditional art of painting has sunk, if long-established standards possess any validity, to a general level which has had no parallel in the civilized world for several centuries.

On the first of these conclusions I shall not elaborate. My purpose in making this

[1] How do I conceive of teaching? A studio of five or six students, at most, with a master who knows how to teach the elements of his craft and leads you with assurance to the goal of art, who teaches you to understand nature through the museum and who brings you back to nature on leaving the museum.

investigation has been solely constructive. It is no part of that purpose to attack any method or school of painting now in vogue. The ultimate worth of pictures painted today will not be affected by anything written in their praise or blame. Time is a ruthless appraiser of art and, by and large, a very just one.

This book is addressed to readers disposed to consider the complete deterioration of the older forms of painting a disaster to civilization. I believe that there are very many such people in America today. But few of them appreciate how nearly that disaster is upon us. I know that a large number of art lovers do feel uneasy about the kind of painting encouraged by our art museums and fostered in our art schools today. But a majority of them are naturally diffident about asserting their own views in the face of the unanimity of what they believe to be expert opinion. For that very reason I have been at some pains to demonstrate why the validity of this supposedly expert opinion is open to question. As a matter of record I will state here that all the trained painters I have known, several of whom were considered leaders in their profession a short quarter of a century ago, have been unanimous in their estimate of critical opinions emanating from theorists, amateurs, and incompetent artists. Without exception these painters considered such opinions at best irrelevant, more frequently pernicious. In my experience of accomplished painters I have never met with a dissenting view on this matter. And their attitude is certainly corroborated by the views of their predecessors, in so far as they have been recorded. The earliest statement of this attitude which I have encountered was made by one Quintus Fabius Pictor, a Roman painter who flourished about 300 B.C. The dictum is quoted by St. Jerome: "*'Felices,' inquit Fabius 'essent artes si de illis soli artifices judicarent.'*"[1]

Expressions of similar ideas made by other painters have been included among the chapter headings in this volume. The most succinct and penetrating statement of the case comes from Leonardo da Vinci, who jotted down in his notebook: "The supreme tragedy is when theory outstrips performance."

It is this very tragedy which has overtaken the art of painting today. And none of these older painters, not even Whistler, inveighing against the Dilettante in the eighties, dreamed that the amateur fringes of art would exercise the control of painting that they do at present. None of them, protesting against the ineptness of professional critics, ever envisaged a criticism at once as ignorant and as self-assured as that dispensed by the art writers attached to our newspapers and periodicals. "Toute opinion est bonne," Ingres was wont to say, "sauf celle d'un mauvais connaisseur."[2] And it has been an accepted axiom in studios to heed the considered judgment of the highly skilled painter and the instinctive reaction of the untutored individual, be he the expressman or the window cleaner, whereas the self-conscious comment of the half-taught student, of the bad painter, of the graduate of art courses or the reader of

[1] "'The arts,' said Fabius, 'would be fortunate were only craftsmen to judge them.'"

[2] Every opinion is valuable except that of a bad connoisseur.

"arty" books, is generally found worthless. These latter, in so far as they existed in his time, were the people that Ingres referred to as "mauvais connaisseurs."

Surely it is unwise to ignore an opinion apparently shared by all who have mastered the art of painting. For this art is not acquired intuitively nor do fine pictures just "paint themselves," as one actually hears said nowadays. By the time a man has executed a really good picture his mind and eye have been subjected to a hard discipline which usually enables him to think clearly and analytically about the kind of painting he has mastered.[1] He has proved his right to speak with authority about it. So it is well to have the public know that the standards and ideas fashionable in artistic circles today did not originate among painters competent in their craft nor have they been accepted by such painters. I do not make this statement as an attack on art critics and museum experts. But I present the fact because I deem it of vital importance to the future of painting that people genuinely interested in the advancement of art should learn to question the validity of many opinions and judgments about painting nowadays presented to the public as ultimate truths.

There will not be good painting again until we once more have among us talented men who also know how to paint. We can do nothing to increase the amount of talent born into the world. Human beings sufficiently gifted to become good painters are always extremely rare. But a few such regularly do appear in each generation, though great genius is entirely exceptional. The first duty of a society to its artists is to give its talented members the opportunity to develop their gifts. For painters this means, above all, a chance to get a sound training in their art during their formative years. Under the present dispensation this has become virtually impossible. The proof is that for fifteen or twenty years no painter of even mediocre skill has emerged in this country.

One of my acquaintances recently asked a gentleman who, by virtue of the position he holds, exercises a very great influence over American painting, under whom her daughter should study. "It doesn't matter," replied this sapient museum director. "There are thirteen hundred or so artists in the country who could teach her all she need know about painting. American painters are very skillful technically, but they

[1] A small percentage of painters do seem to achieve quite remarkable results without apparently developing any sort of critical faculty. These generally seem to be individuals with great gifts of assimilation who acquired their skills rapidly under teachers able to lead them in the direction best suited to their talents. They were thus spared the necessity of close thinking during their student days, their teachers doing their thinking for them, so to speak. In later life, when confronted with types of painting foreign to their early training, painters of this sort are usually completely bewildered, admiring or disliking in accordance with obscure emotional factors which they are themselves unable to explain. John Sargent seems to have been such a painter. Two of the best painters we have in this country today, artists whose work suggests a most carefully considered and analytical approach, present a similarly baffling lack of critical judgment. But such cases are comparatively rare. Unfortunately the influence which they properly exert by virtue of their achievement is apt to be quite harmful, their opinions being irrational. The view that painters are poor judges of painting, in so far as it has any justification, is based on the mistakes of such painters and on the fallacy that practicing one type of painting develops understanding of dissimilar types.

have nothing to say." There is nobody living in the world today capable of teaching a student all he needs to know to become a thoroughly competent painter. There are scarcely thirteen painters in America even capable of giving a talented student a sound basis of training in a limited field. But the above quotation is characteristic of what is being said nowadays by men of influence. Their utterances will make curious reading for our great-grandchildren.

The greatest catastrophe in human history has reached its term and the world is addressing itself to the task of reconstructing a shattered civilization. We have been told again and again that the United States is in a uniquely privileged position to lead in this reconstruction. The task ahead is colossal and will enlist the efforts of several generations. But the possibilities for accomplishment in every field are unlimited. We are at one of those moments in the history of mankind when, for a time, every hope seems justified.

Painting is one of the cultural activities that is sure to be encouraged. Can a genuine school of painting be re-established? No one conversant with present conditions could give an optimistic answer to this question. Too much of the needful knowledge has already been lost. The would-be cultured public has now been indoctrinated with fancy esthetics for so long that they will be reluctant to abandon ideas which make them feel among the initiated. And a vast number of people are so happy in the belief that their own ignorant and incompetent way of painting is a fine art that they will naturally remain averse from accepting any higher standard which would show up their work for what it is. The outlook for the really talented boy or girl with a genuine feeling for painting is black indeed.

Yet in them lies the only hope for the future of traditional painting. If only a tiny fraction of the money and energy spent every year in this country on the encouragement of art were devoted to giving this handful of young people, and there can never be more than a handful, an opportunity to learn their trade a great step would be taken in the right direction. The most articulate of our modern painters has issued a clarion call for the means to take care of our "fifty thousand artists" after the war, whoever they may be. Surely it would be only fair to provide a real training and a start for the twenty or so boys with a marked aptitude for painting who presumably are born in a country of this size during the course of every three or four years.

How should these potential painters be helped? In planning for them we have everything to learn from the past, both from its successes and from its failures. The entire experience of the last fifty years can be ruled out as a total failure. The disastrous art-school system, as well as the art class run for profit, have proved worse than useless for the training of professional painters. The more nearly the system adopted resembles the apprentice system the more likely it is to give good results.

A study of the great eras of European painting leads to the following conclusions: A highly competent painter should work surrounded by a small group of pupils. These pupils should be of his own choosing, a choice based on the master's belief

that each pupil is capable of developing into a genuine painter under his teaching. The master should have complete control over his pupils, directing their studies according to his best judgment, and be free to dismiss any students who fail to keep up with the required standard. The teacher should not be dependent on the fees of his pupils, so there will be no temptation to increase their number for financial gain or for the support of his enterprise.

Obviously these are precisely the conditions which existed whenever a painter of great skill and recognized position admitted pupils to his studio or workshop. His income was assured by the sale of his pictures and his authority over his students was enhanced by his prestige in the world at large. He gave his time to teaching chiefly from a sense of obligation to his art, as doctors today instruct in our medical schools and hospitals. Unfortunately a similar setup seems very unlikely to recur in the foreseeable future. No painter today has all the requisite qualifications and the few most nearly capable of fulfilling the requirements are precisely the ones most disliked by the experts and the amateur fringe. Furthermore, the only too understandable hostility of these experts for anything savoring of trained craftsmanship greatly increases the difficulties of a young painter during the trying years between the end of his apprenticeship and his recognition by the purchasing public.

It seems probable that, if we are to give our young painters the necessary conditions for their professional development, those conditions will for a time have to be created artificially. The social and financial structure of the new epoch we are entering is still unknown and any detailed suggestions for the running of such a group would be futile at present. It cannot be too strongly emphasized, however, that the purpose of the setup must be to produce painters competent in all things pertaining to the practice of their profession. This single aim should be kept constantly in view. And the all-essential requisites of a painter capable of running such an establishment are two: first, knowledge of how pictures are painted with the ability to paint them well, and, secondly, a gift for analyzing and imparting that knowledge and ability to others. However it may be in other arts, these two things are absolutely indispensable to the effective teaching of painting. To this rule I have never found an exception.

I do not mean to disparage existing art schools. The best of them undoubtedly render valuable services. But turning out trained painters is not one of these. I do not mean to discourage the enthusiasm of those who find in so-called "modern painting" an outlet for their energies or a solace from the disappointments of life. But these activities do nothing to further the great art of painting, as the world for centuries has known it. Unfortunately, they have done much to destroy it. The so-called "moderns" have been given ample encouragement, more, perhaps, than will seem justifiable to an impoverished world faced with the aftermath of a colossal war. Surely the time has come to give some consideration to the little band of young people who, against the tides of fashion and apart from all reward, would still strive to become honest and competent practitioners of an extraordinarily difficult art.

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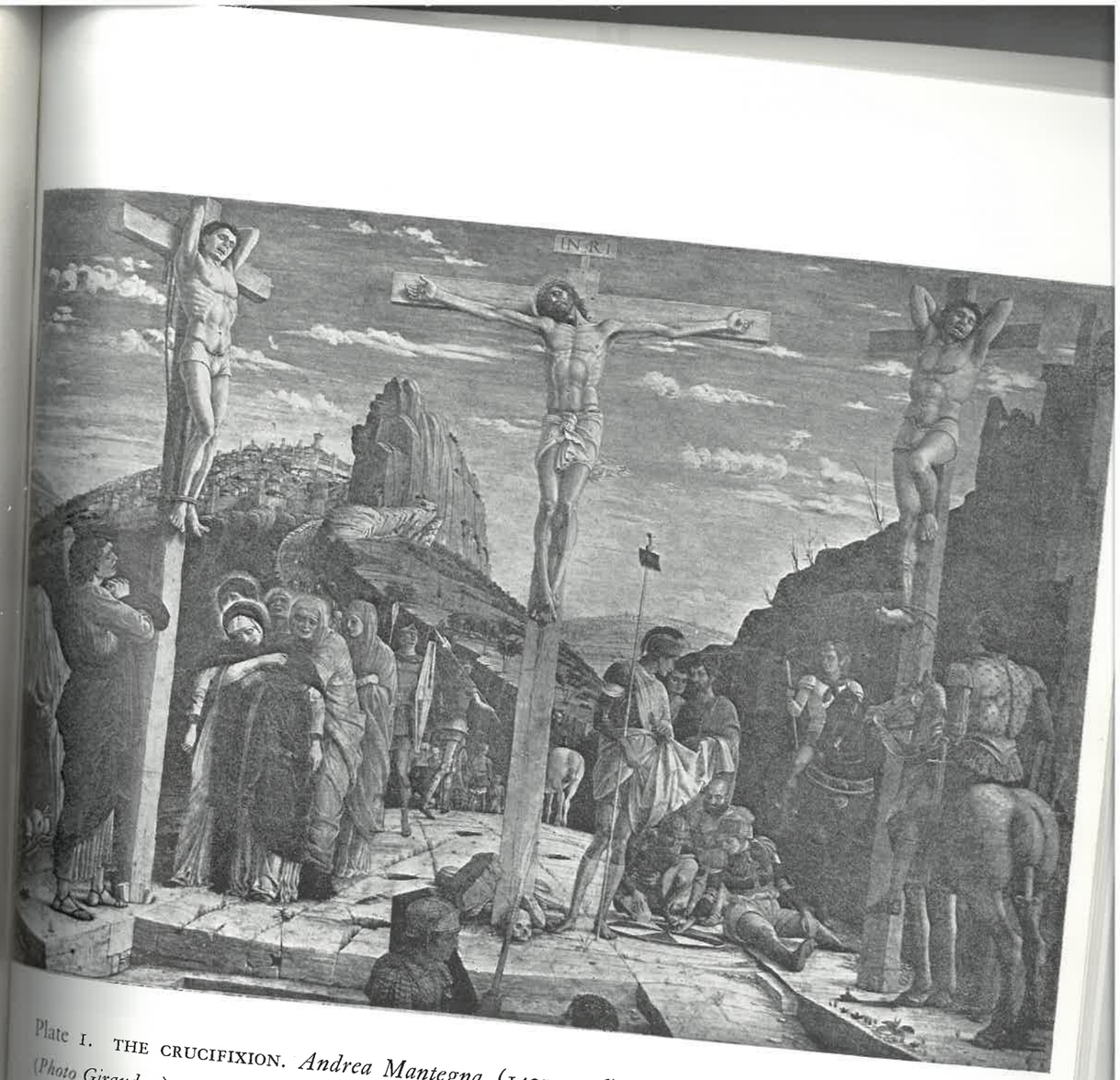


Plate 1. THE CRUCIFIXION. *Andrea Mantegna* (1431–1506)
(Photo Giraudon)

Plate 2. THE ENTOMBMENT. *Titian* (1477 or 1489–1576)
(*Photo Clément et Cie., Paris–New York*)

Plate 3. THE "FIGHTING TEMERAIRE." *J. M. W. Turner* (1775–1851)
Turner had a fine feeling for balancing his masses of light and dark tone. Here this balance is so beautifully contrived that even the small black and white reproduction conveys a sense of spaciousness and grandeur which is independent of the detailed forms or the subject represented. (*Courtesy National Gallery, London*)

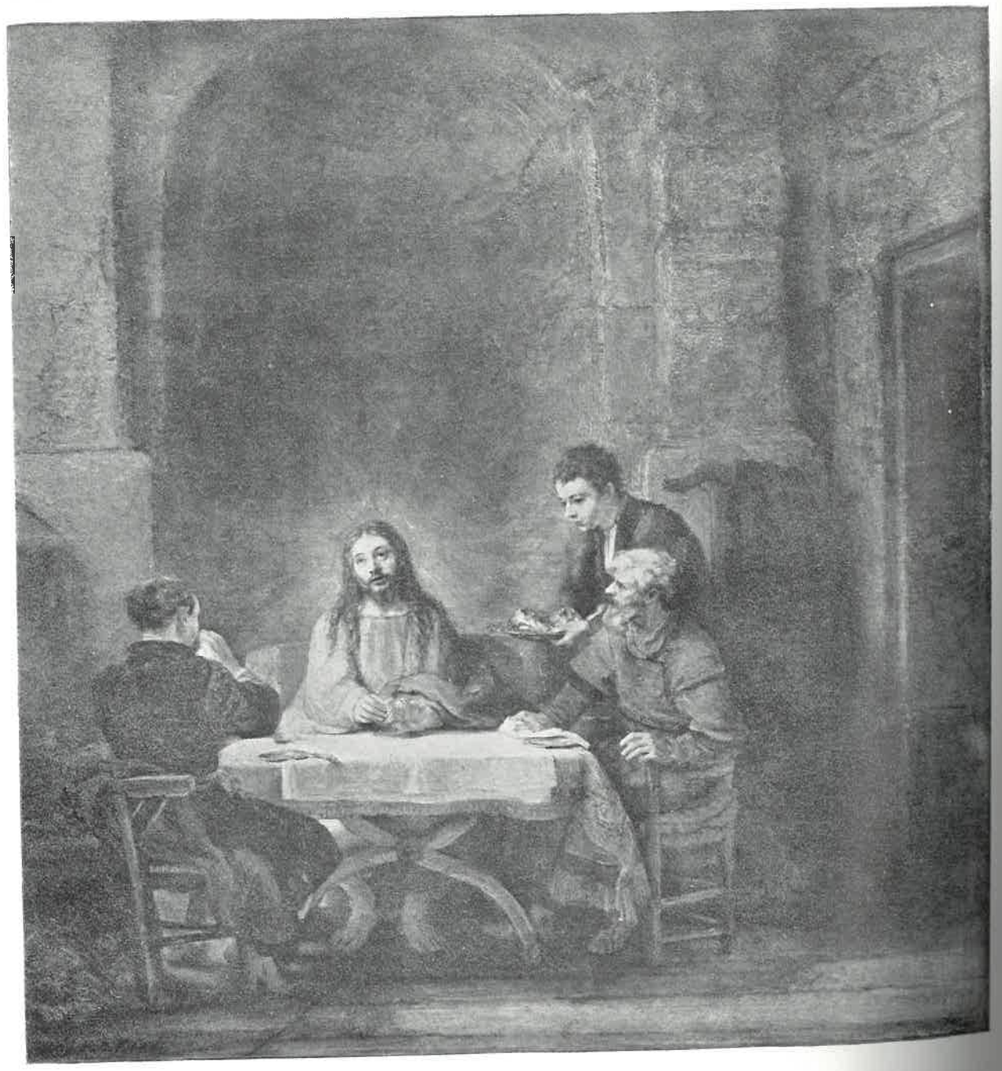


Plate 4. CHRIST AT EMMAUS. *Rembrandt Van Ryn* (1606–69)

The mystery and solemnity of this famous masterpiece is in part the result of the relation between the figures and the unfilled portions of the picture. The silhouettes of the lights and darks are scarcely stressed at all. (*Photo Giraudon*)

Plate 5. THE GLORIFICATION OF FRANCESCO BARBARO. *Giambattista Tiepolo* (1696–1770)

Tiepolo's unique gifts as a decorator can be *fully* appreciated only when his pictures are seen in the settings for which they were intended. However, the reproduction conveys some idea of the ingenious and entertaining silhouettes with which he embroidered his compositions. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 6. CHRIST FALLING UNDER THE CROSS. *Paolo Veronese* (1528–88)

A masterly composition utilizing all the resources of pictorial design and representation. (*Photo Lévy-Neurdein*)

Plate 7. THE BURIAL OF A MARTYR. *William Bouguereau* (1825–1905)
(*Photo Giraudon*)

Plate 8. "AND THE SEA GAVE UP THE DEAD WHICH WERE IN IT."
Frederick Leighton (1830–96)
(*Courtesy Trustees of the Tate Gallery*)

Plate 9. SAINTE GENEVIEVE AND THE ANGEL OF RESURRECTION. *Jean Paul Laurens* (1838–1921)
(*Photo Giraudon*)

Plate 10. THE PLAGUE IN ROME. *Elie Delaunay* (1828–91)
(*Photo Clément et Cie., Paris–New York*)

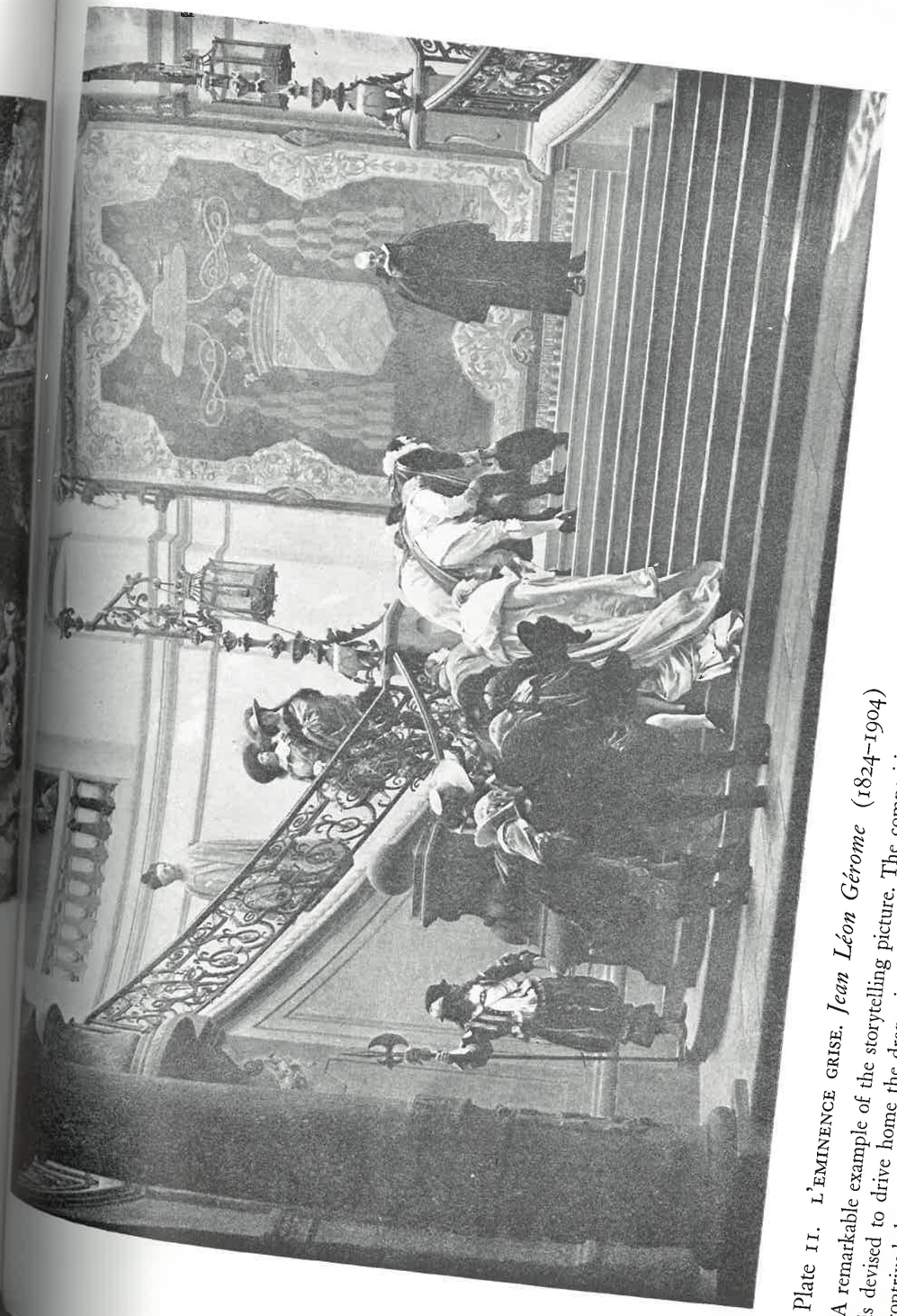


Plate 11. L'EMINENCE GRISE. *Jean Léon Gérome* (1824–1904)
A remarkable example of the storytelling picture. The composition is devised to drive home the dramatic action and is so cunningly contrived that every line of the pattern contributes to this purpose. The anecdote may seem a little trivial, as is often the case in Gérome's pictures, but the design has great distinction and the execution throughout is amazing. Incidentally, no painter today would know the procedures necessary to make such a picture even if he possessed the technical skill to carry them through. (Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

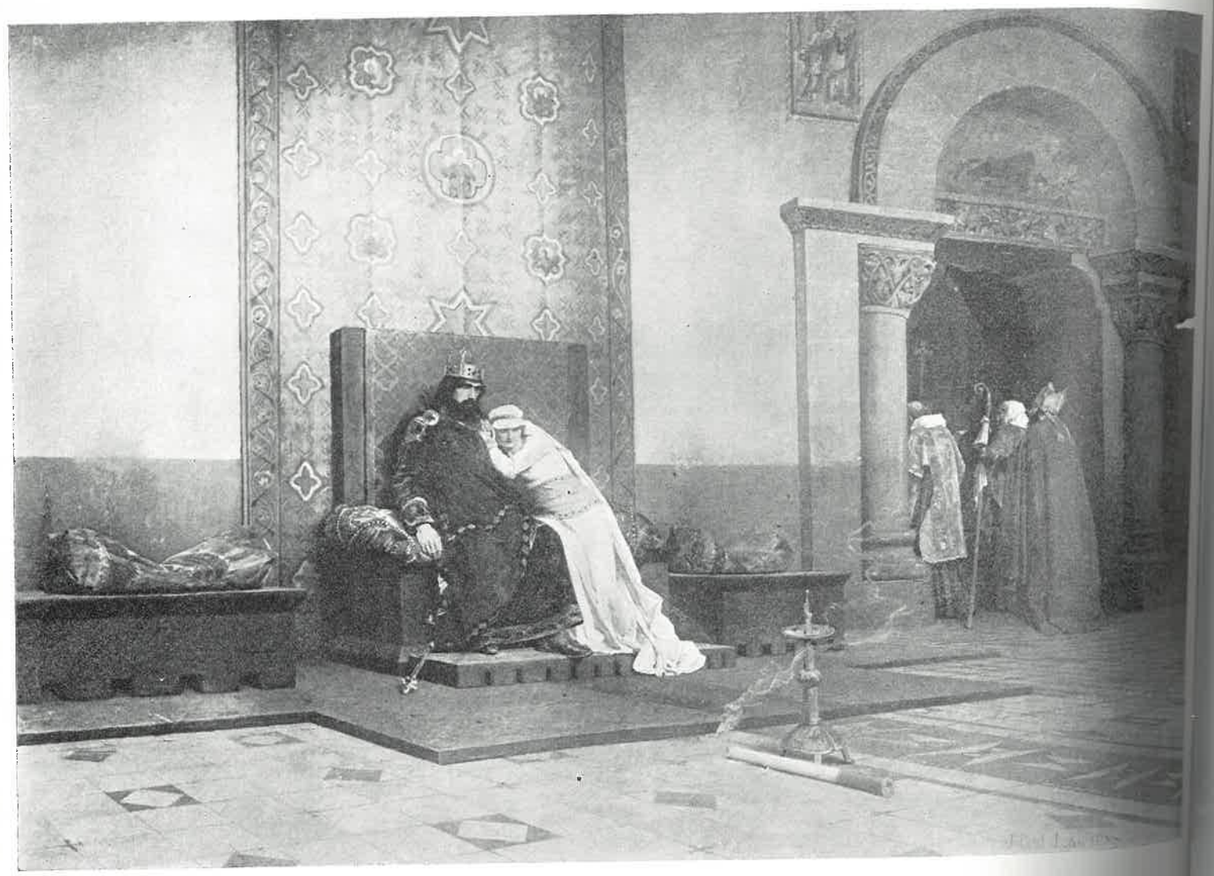


Plate 12. THE EXCOMMUNICATION OF ROBERT THE GOOD.
Jean Paul Laurens (1838–1921)

Laurens was able to give dramatic life to historical episodes which, in the hands of almost any other painter, became tedious archaeological reconstructions. He accomplished this by means of a very personal type of composition, draftsmanship of a high order, and an imagination aided by sound scholarship. (*Photo Giraudon*)

Plate 13. TURKISH SENTINEL. *Charles Bargue* (died 1883)
For sheer skill of workmanship on a tiny scale this picture by a pupil of Gérome has never been surpassed. The notable thing is that, in spite of its small dimensions and the amount of detail involved, neither unity nor atmospheric effect is lost. The painting of the pleated skirt is a sheer miracle which defies analysis. We today do not even know what type of brush or what kind of medium was used in the making of such a passage. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

Plate 14. PORTRAIT OF THE MARQUISE D'ORVILLIERS.
Jacques Louis David (1748–1825)

David's theories about the antique did not prevent him from characterizing his portraits forcefully. (*Lent by the Louvre. Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 15. GOING TO THE FAIR. *François Boucher* (1703–70)

The great decorative art of Boucher marked the supreme flowering of the French eighteenth-century tricks and mannerisms against which David later instituted his "reforms." (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

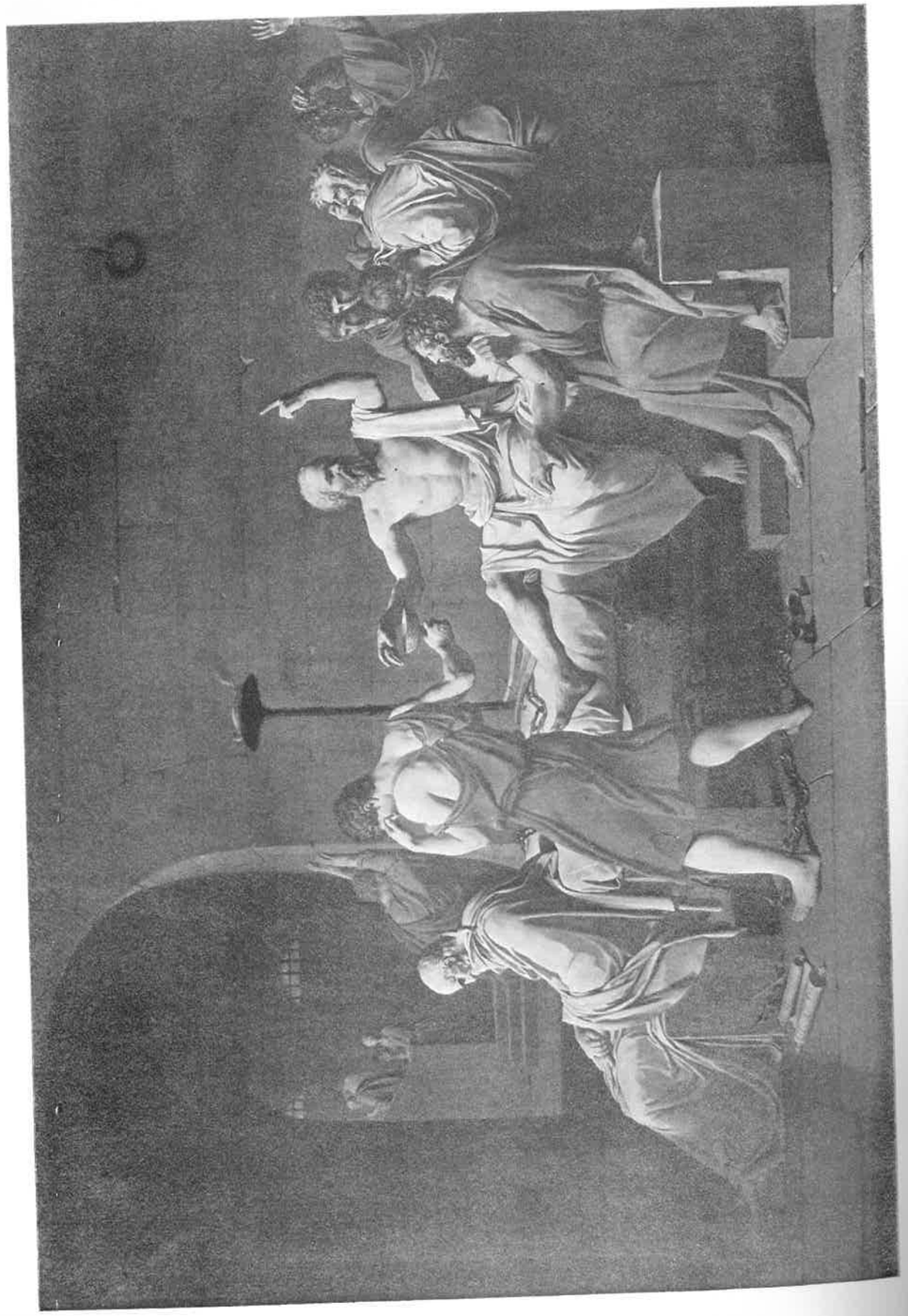


Plate 16. THE DEATH OF SOCRATES. *Jacques Louis David* (1748–1825)
It is interesting to compare the workmanship of this painting with the one by Greuze reproduced on the opposite page and to observe that when David worked in the traditional eighteenth-century manner he was a better craftsman than Greuze. The Greuze under-painting is in a warmer tonality than David's but the two procedures are substantially the same. David subsequently abandoned this technique and did not transmit it to his pupils. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

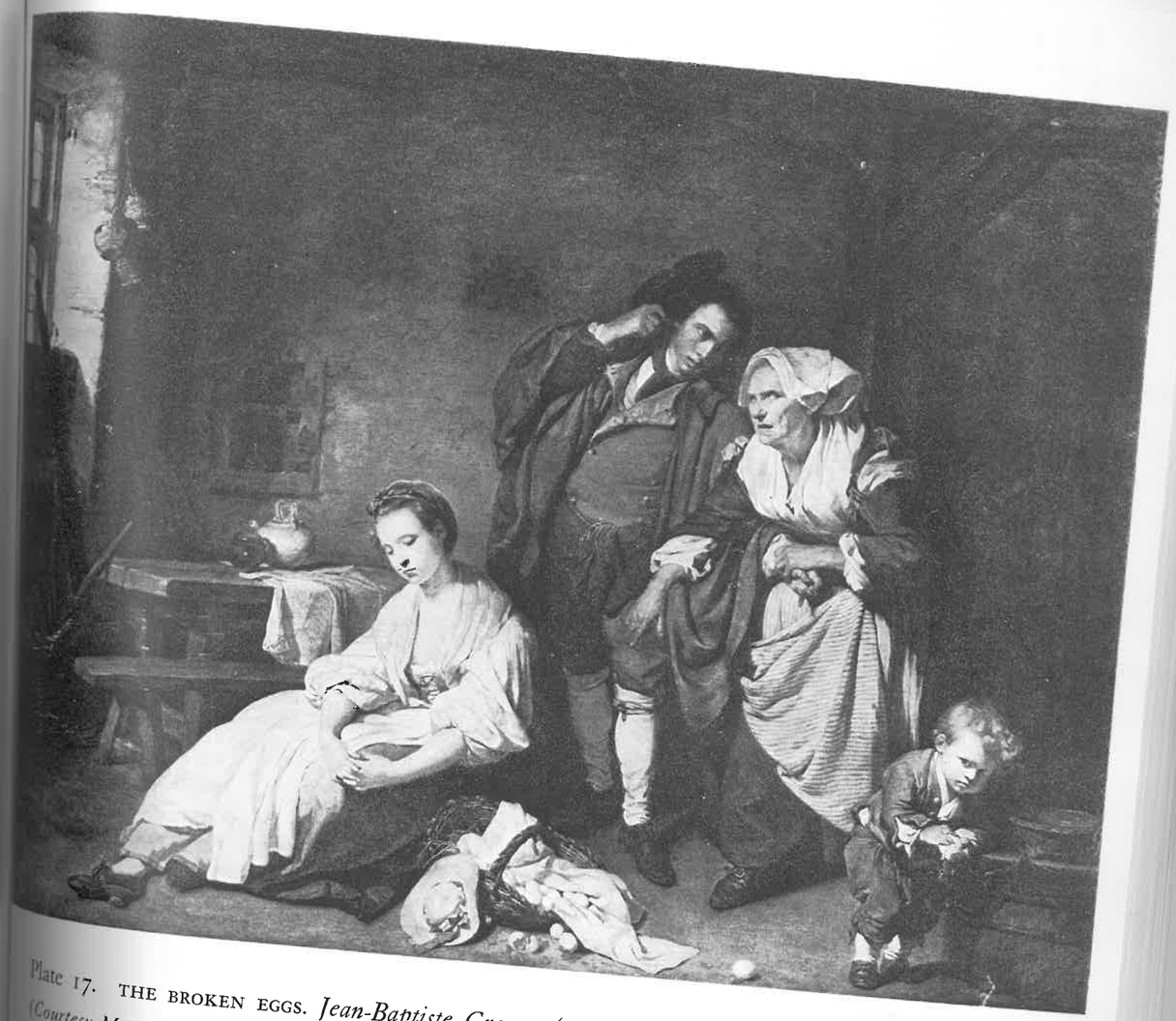


Plate 17. THE BROKEN EGGS. *Jean-Baptiste Greuze* (1725–1805)
(*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

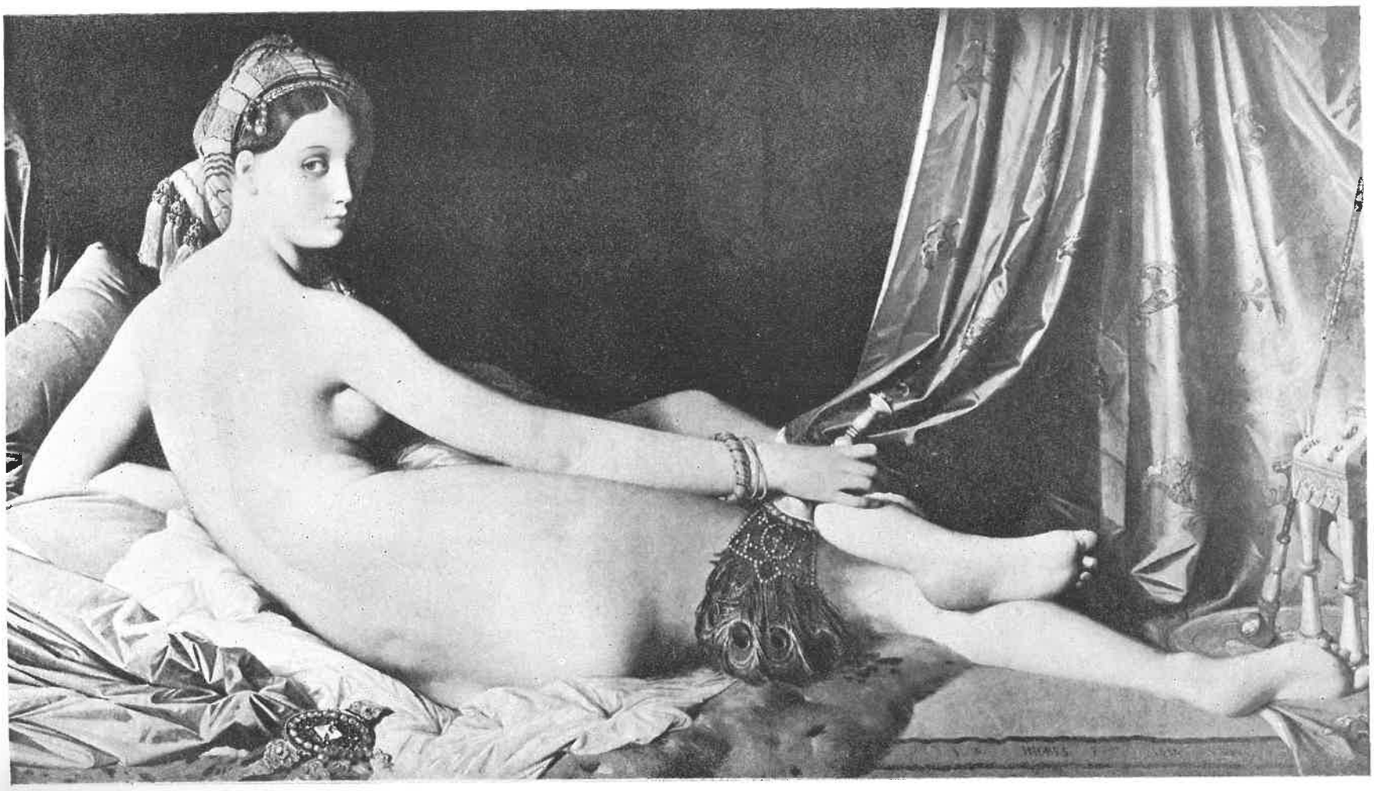


Plate 18. ODALISQUE. *J. A. D. Ingres* (1780–1867)
(*Photo Giraudon*)

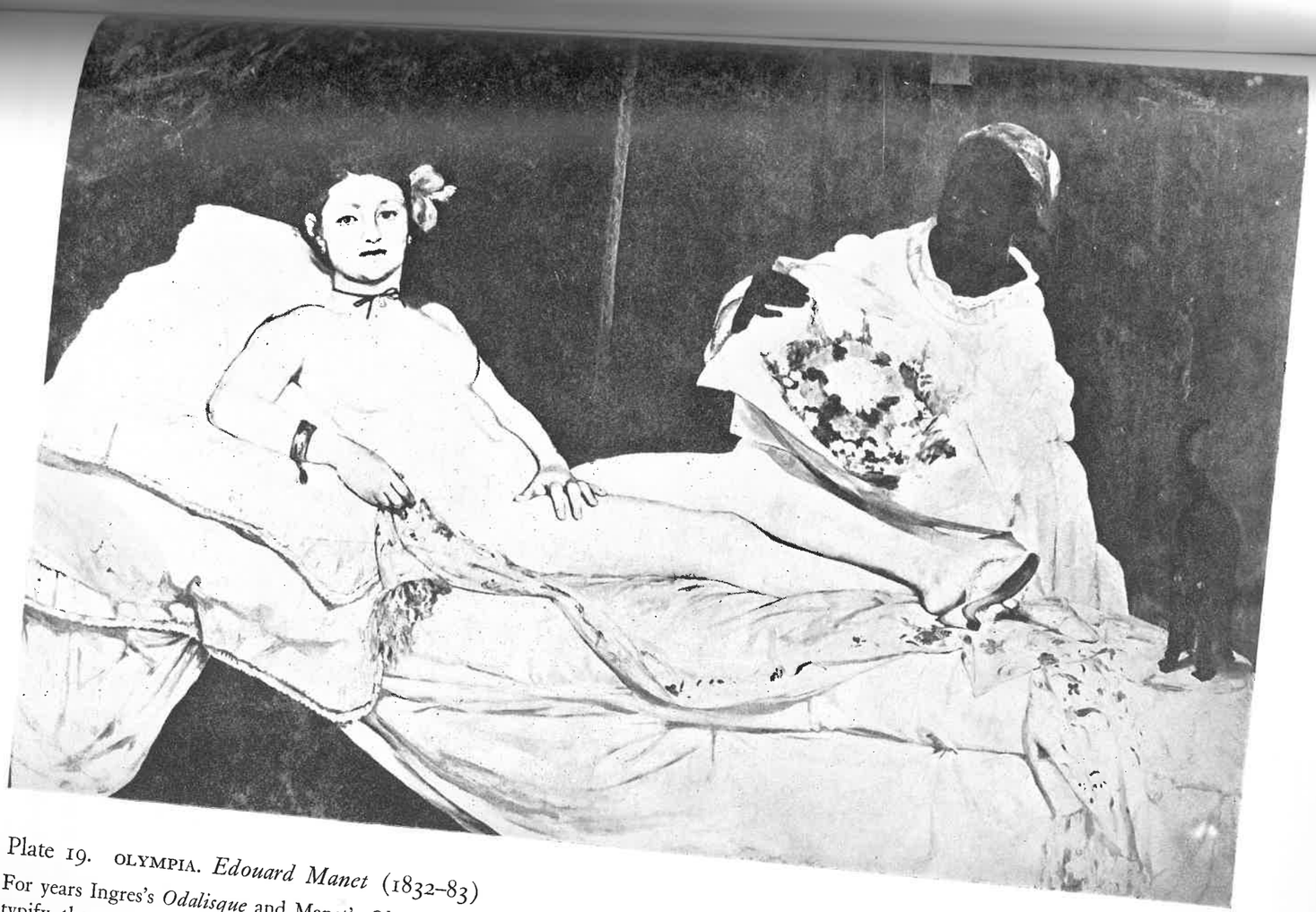


Plate 19. OLYMPIA. *Edouard Manet* (1832–83)
For years Ingres's *Odalisque* and Manet's *Olympia* have seemed to typify the contrast between the academic and the impressionist treatment of the nude, the one obtaining its effect through linear design and stylized form, the other by balance of tone and simplified values. Equally characteristic is the way in which Ingres maintained his conception of an ideal female form whereas Manet emphasized the traits of a particular model to the verge of caricature.
(*Photo Giraudon*)

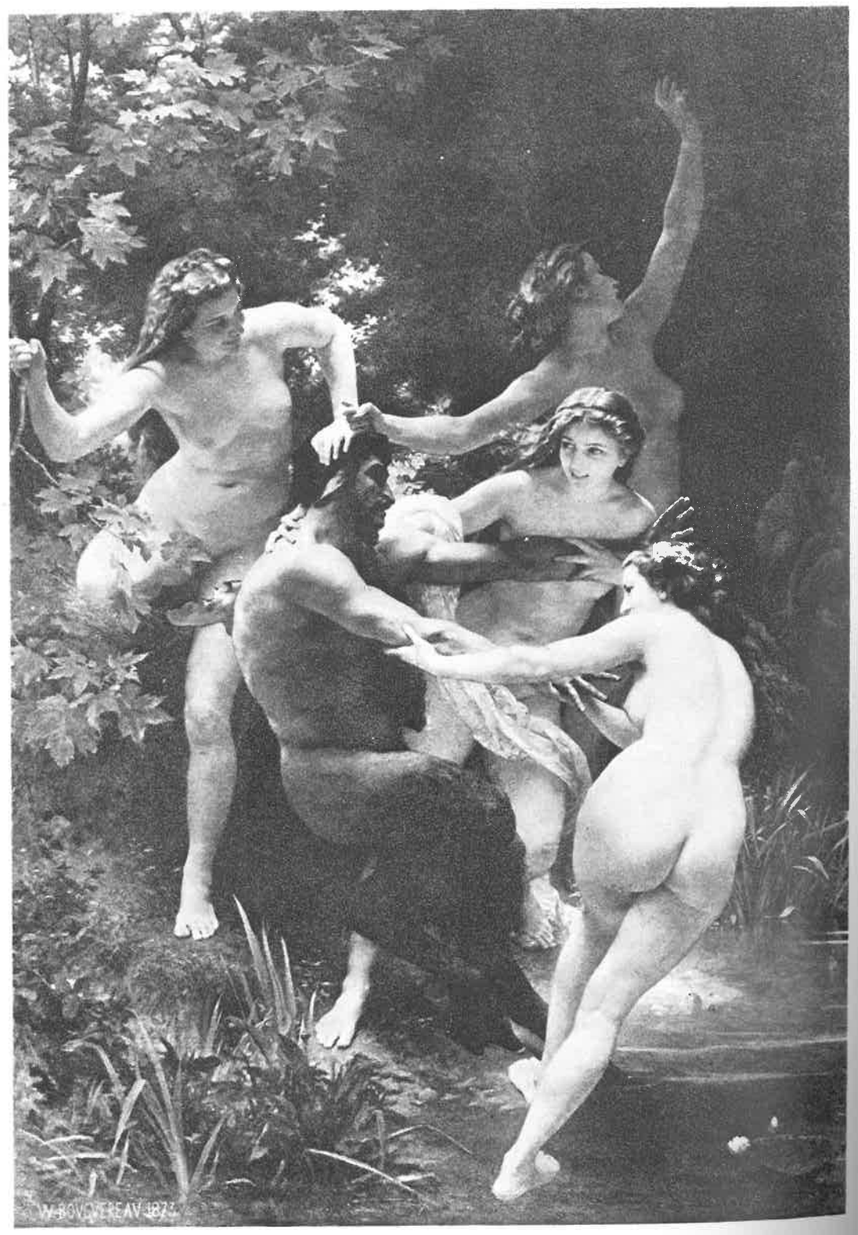


Plate 20. NYMPHS AND SATYR. *William Bouguereau* (1825–1905)
(*Courtesy of Durand-Ruel Galleries*)

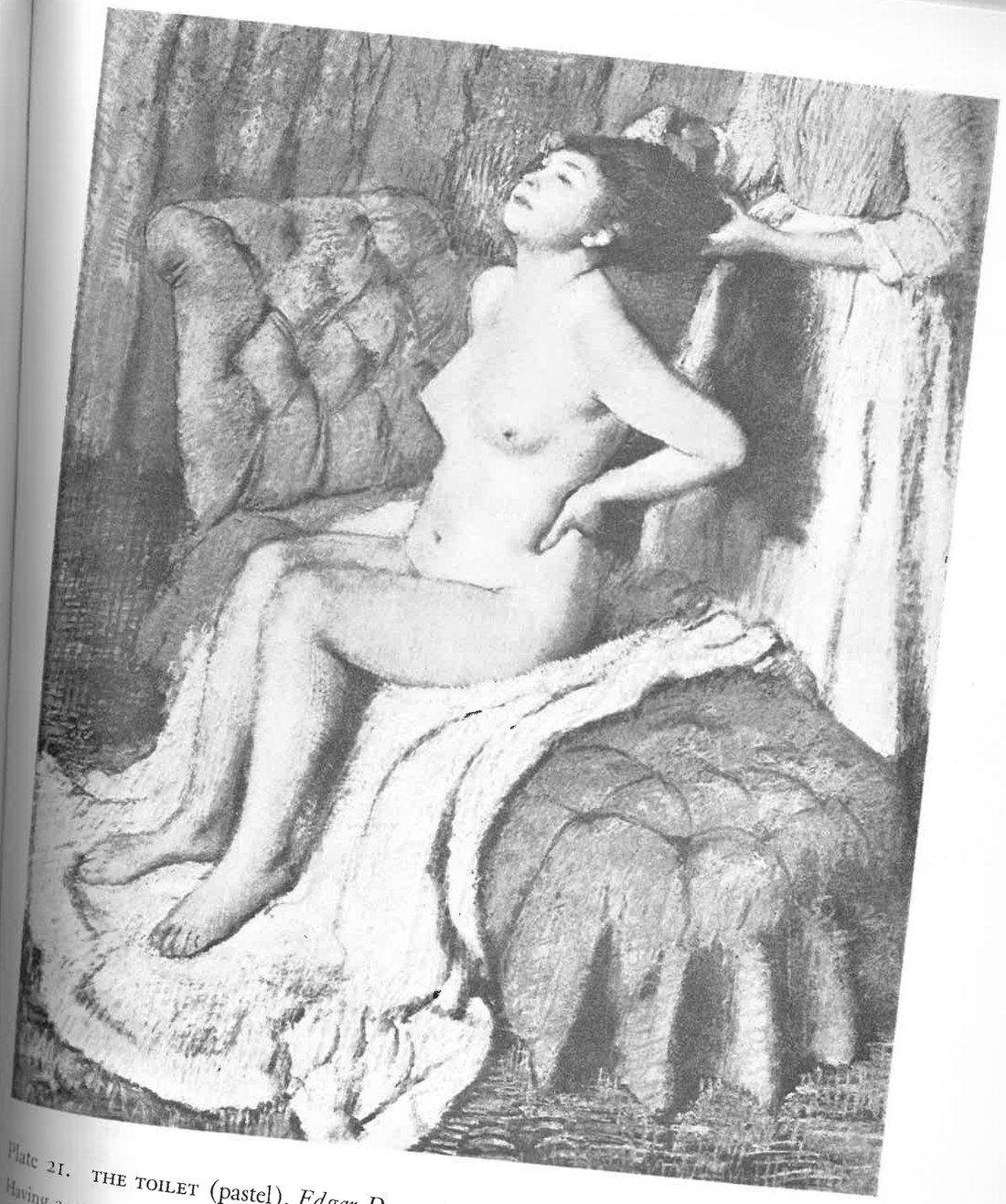


Plate 21. THE TOILET (pastel). *Edgar Degas* (1834–1917)
Having a command of draftsmanship even superior to that of his academic contemporaries Degas drew the nude with an intention wholly different from theirs, stressing the apparent shape rather than the inner structure and the idiosyncrasies of the individual model rather than the general forms. But Degas's profound knowledge of anatomy and his thorough understanding of classic art contributed a great deal to the style of his drawing. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 22. THE BATH OF PSYCHE.
Frederick Leighton (1830–96)

Critics who sneer at Leighton's predilection for feminine loveliness apparently fail to perceive his remarkable feeling for design. In this picture the exquisite pattern made by the arms and the drapery of the figure silhouetted against the curtain and framed by the vertical lines of the columns, the beautifully adjusted balance of the darker masses, and the finely sensed relationship between the straight lines of the architecture and the curved shapes are very notable. (*Courtesy Trustees of the Tate Gallery*)

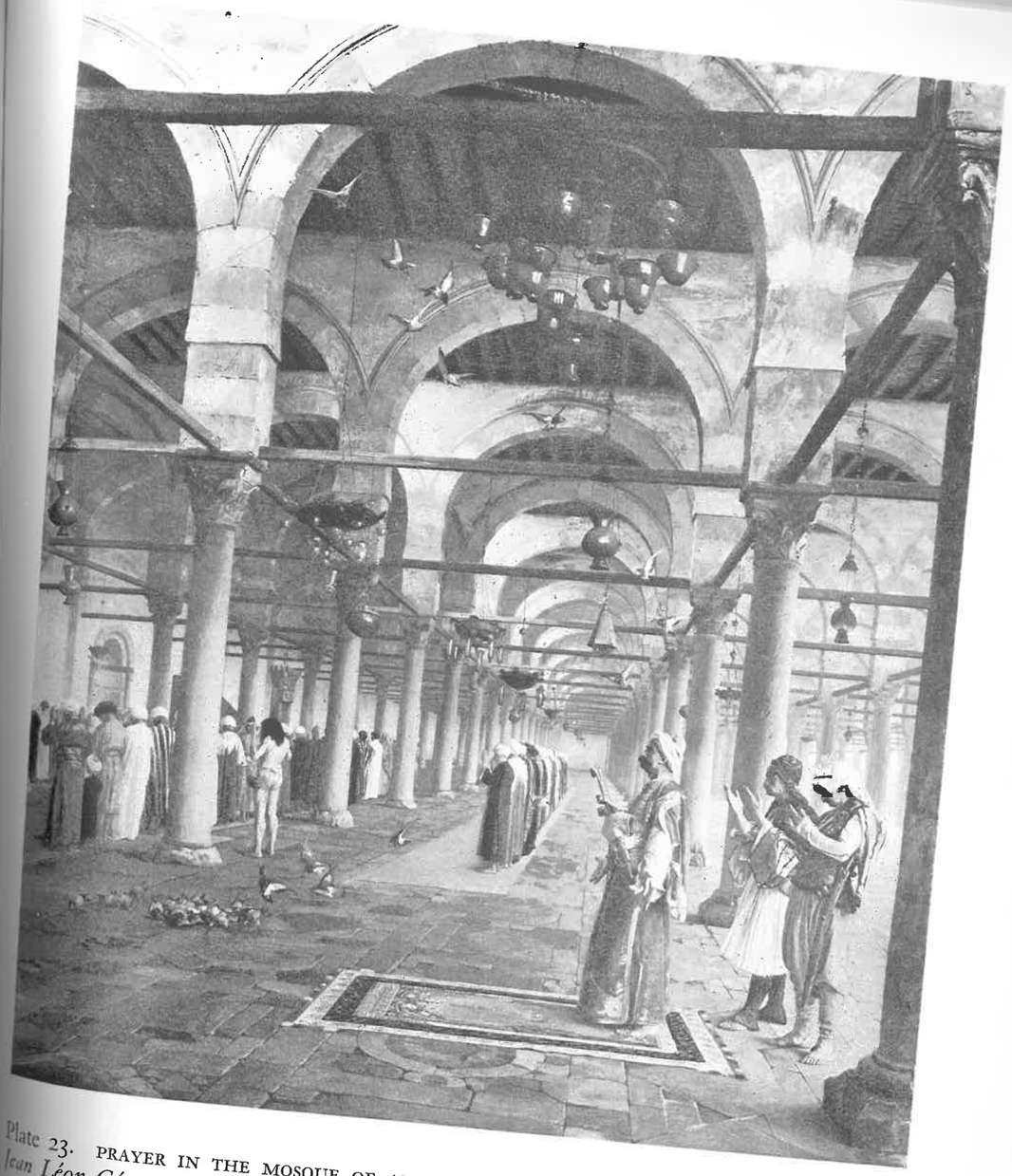


Plate 23. PRAYER IN THE MOSQUE OF AMROU; OLD CAIRO.
Jean Léon Gérome (1824–1904)

The unflagging invention displayed in the designing of this canvas is even more amazing than its flawless execution. In spite of its wealth of detail the composition as a whole gives a sense of harmonious unity, yet no part of it is slighted. Note, for instance, how the pigeons are distributed to cut the lines of the architecture and to contribute patterns related to the larger scheme of the composition. This is also true of the hanging lamps and other accessories, all of which appear to be painted in as they happened to occur but which unfailingly impinge on each other and on the structural lines of the building in such a way that the shapes have balance and variety. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 24. KING LEAR'S DAUGHTERS. *Edwin A. Abbey* (1852–1911)

Abbey remains one of the few American painters who ever painted a picture of this type wholly successfully. "King Lear's Daughters" is perhaps his best oil painting, dramatically conceived, well composed, and skillfully executed. The poetic evocation of an ancient half-legendary civilization, which is one of the picture's charms, is in part due to the ingeniously devised costumes and accessories, matters to which Abbey always devoted great care. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

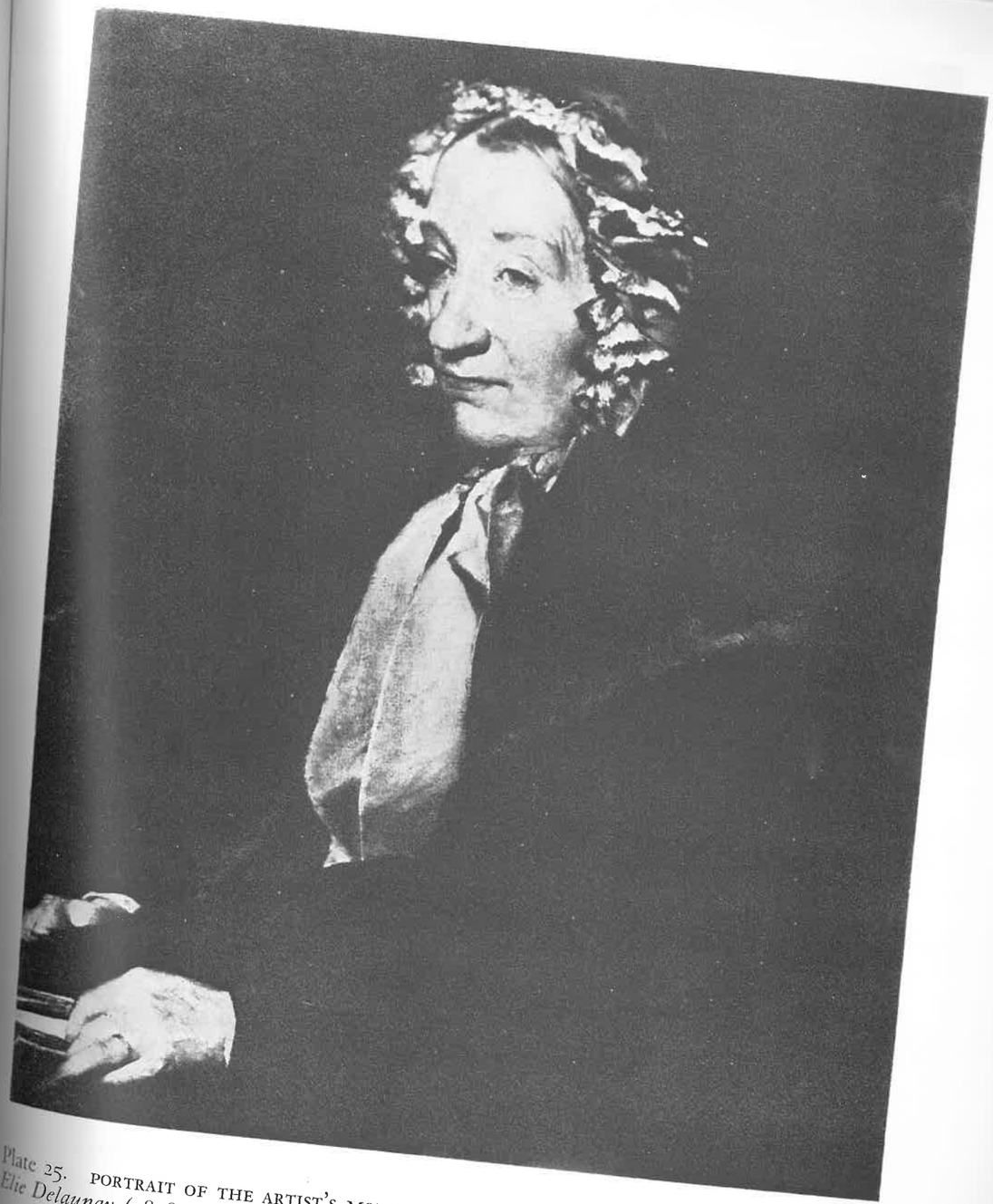


Plate 25. PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST'S MOTHER (detail). *Elie Delaunay* (1828–91)

This portrait shows how much style could be imparted to the treatment of a simple subject without loss of character by a painter thoroughly schooled in the French nineteenth-century academic tradition. (*Photo Giraudon*)

Plate 26. PORTRAIT OF MISS CATHERINE LORILLARD WOLFE.
Alexandre Cabanel (1823–89)

This portrait, painted in 1876, is a fine example of nineteenth-century French academic portrait painting. Its sober distinction and impeccable execution are wholly outside the reach of any painter now living. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

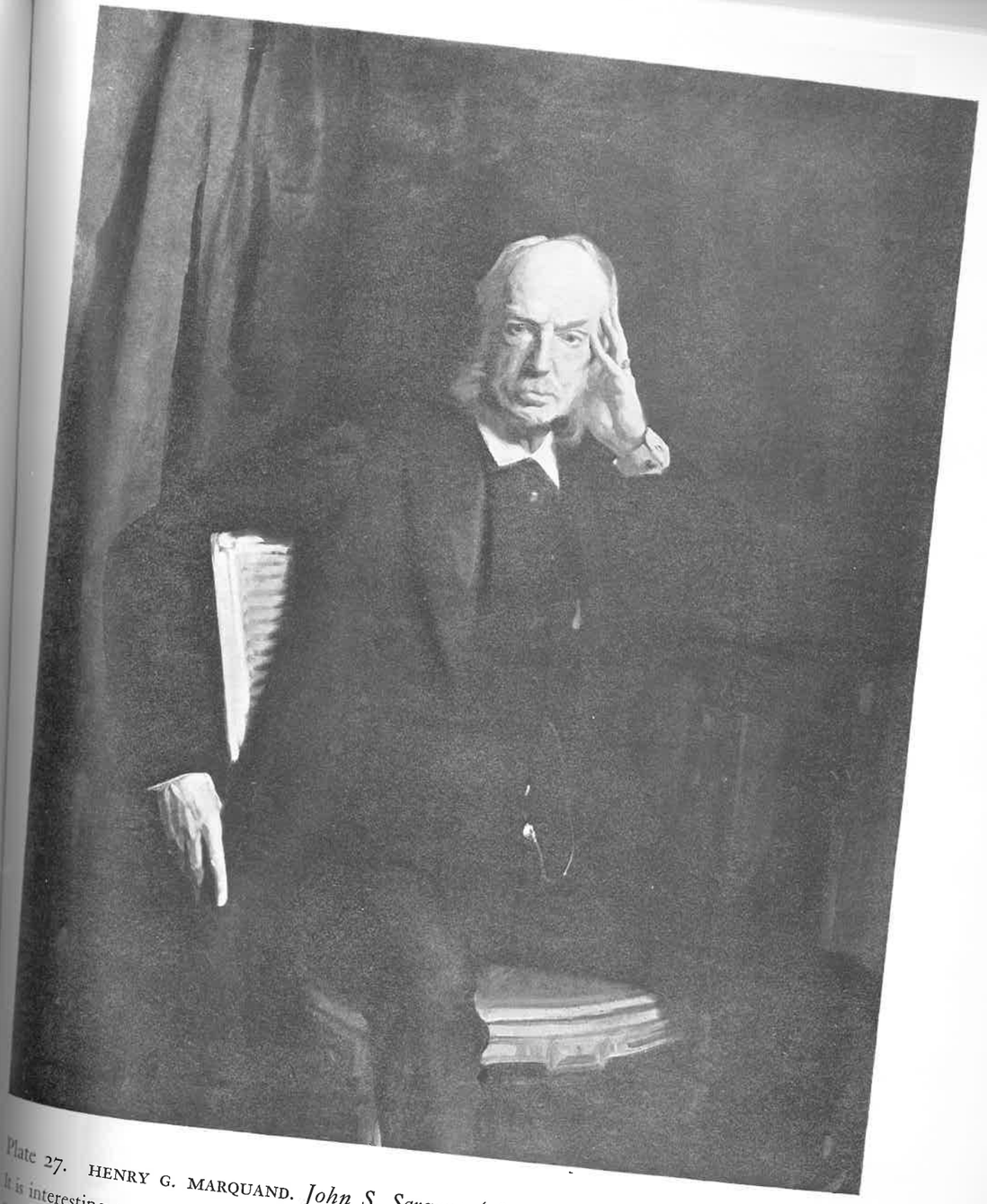


Plate 27. HENRY G. MARQUAND. *John S. Sargent* (1856–1925)

It is interesting to compare this portrait with the one by Cabanel on the opposite page. One of Sargent's best canvases, it demonstrates the effectiveness of the impressionist method. The vitality of the characterization and the forcefulness of the rendering give it a certain superiority over the Cabanel, painted twenty years earlier by a man himself Sargent's senior by twenty-three years. But the decline in technical sureness is apparent, a decline which is even more evident in Sargent's weaker portraits and which becomes unacceptable in the work of his imitators. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 28. GRAZIELLA. *Jules Lefebvre* (1834–1912)

These two paintings of "picturesque" subjects again show the difference between academic and impressionist treatment. Lefebvre's pictures have the defects and the merits of nineteenth-century academic work of the second rank. In spite of the great knowledge and skill which went into it, the painting here reproduced seems hard and artificial. Even the drawing, though in some respects remarkable, is so polished that it lacks character and interest. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 29. EGYPTIAN FELLAH WOMAN AND CHILD. *Léon Bonnat* (1833–1922)

Though Bonnat is often classed among the academic painters of his time, with whom he shared official honors, his painting is essentially impressionist, especially in the pictures executed during the earlier part of his career. Bonnat grew to manhood in Spain, where he studied with Madrazo before he went to Paris to complete his training under Cogniet. The picture reproduced is impressionist in conception and handling. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

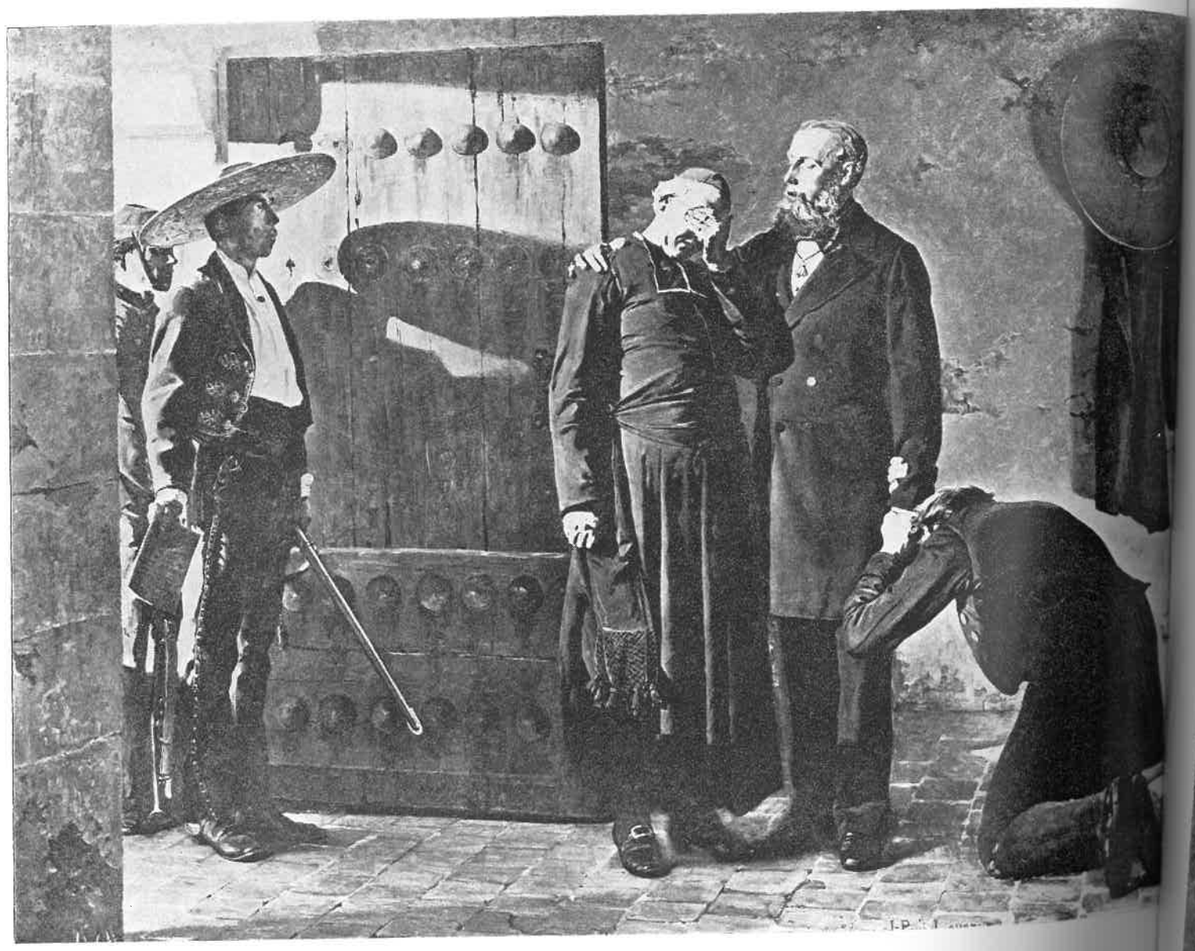


Plate 30. THE LAST MOMENTS OF MAXIMILIAN, EMPEROR OF MEXICO. *Jean Paul Laurens* (1838–1921)

When he painted this scene Laurens was illustrating a recent, almost contemporaneous historical event to which he was able to give an epic character without sacrificing plausibility. (*Photo Clément et Cie., Paris–New York*)

Plate 31. YOUNG WOMAN WITH A WATER JUG. *Jan Vermeer of Delft* (1632–75)

In spite of the bluish tone due to a cool underpainting which has "come through," this picture remains one of the supreme masterpieces of impressionist art. The breadth of treatment, the marvelous truth of the rendering, and the flawless workmanship are a constant source of wonder to painters, as is the classic perfection of the design built up out of a simple gesture and objects of everyday usage. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

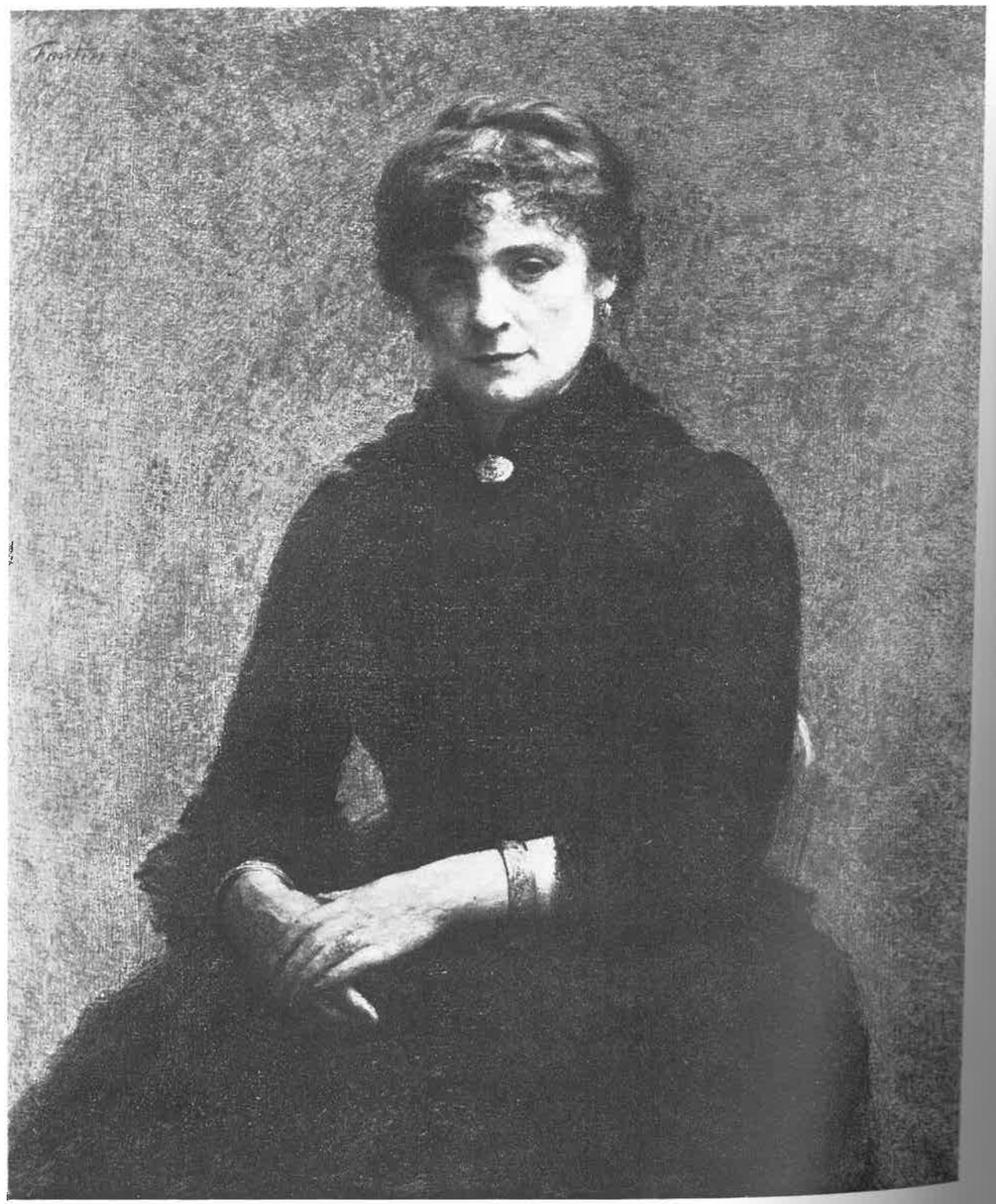


Plate 32. PORTRAIT OF A LADY. *Fantin-Latour* (1836–1904)

Alterations of pigment have destroyed some of the charm of this picture, but it remains a fine example of Fantin's austere and sensitive art. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

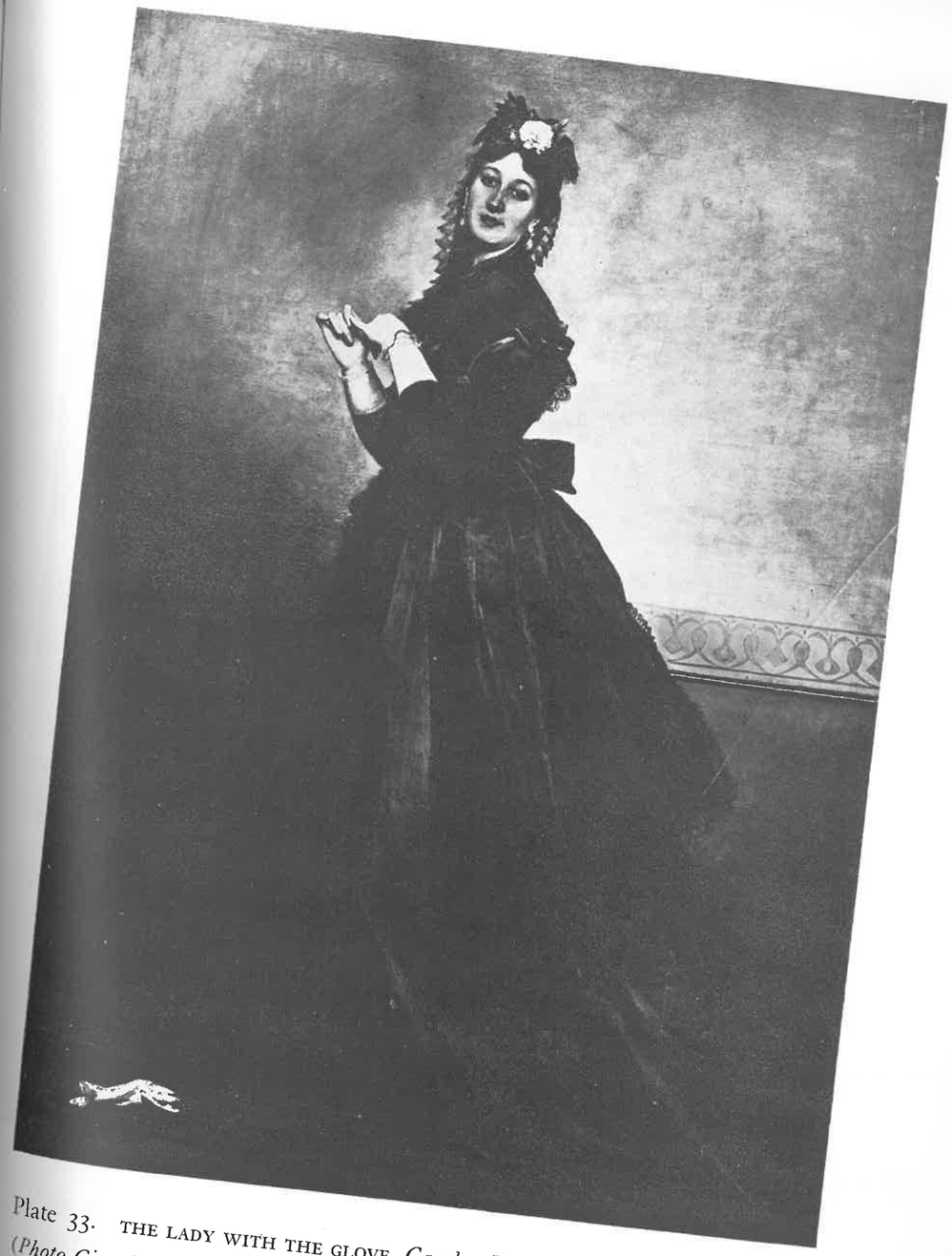


Plate 33. THE LADY WITH THE GLOVE. *Carolus Duran* (1837–1917)
(*Photo Giraudon*)

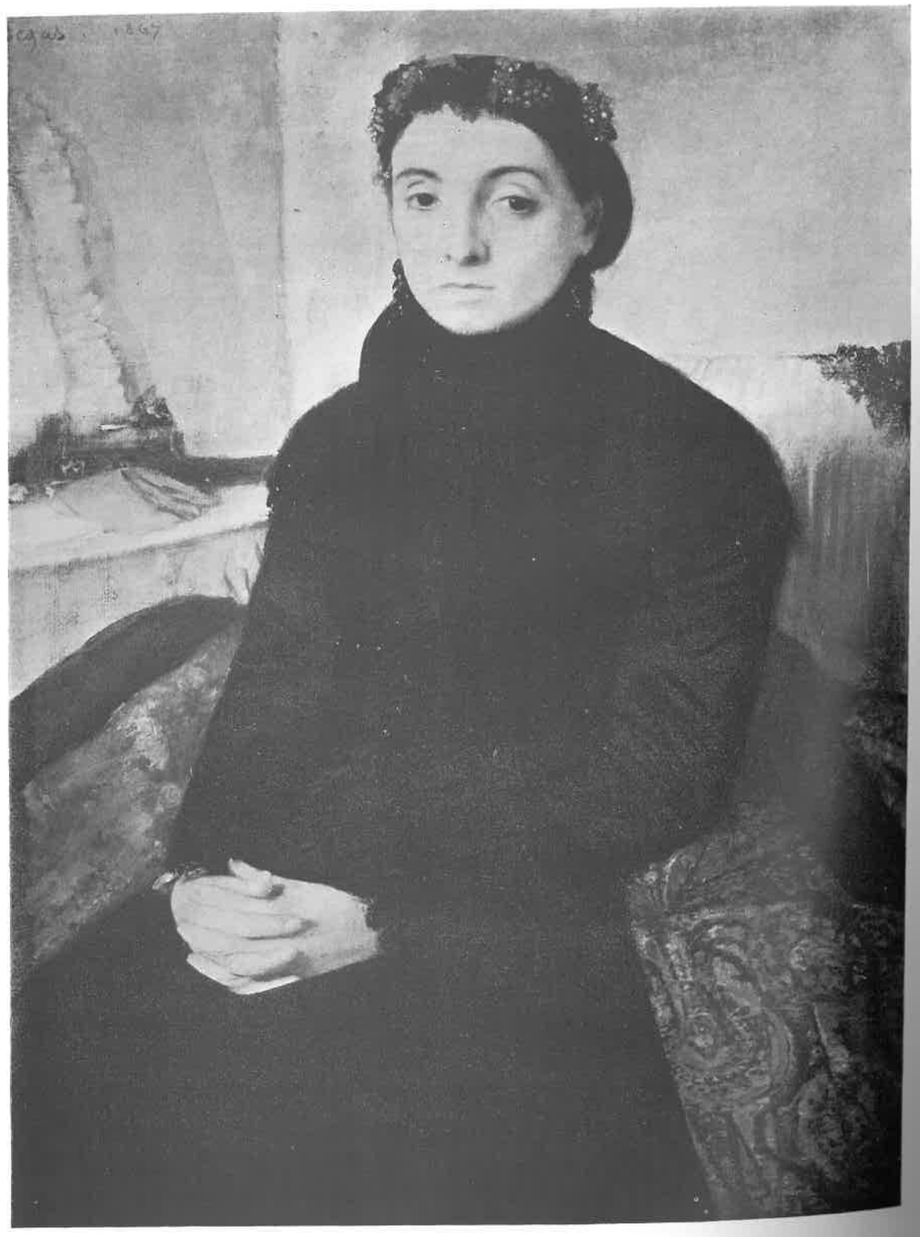


Plate 34. MADAME GAUJELIN. *Edgar Degas* (1834–1917)

Degas could display an exquisite craftsmanship and carry a picture to a high degree of finish when it served his purpose. (*Courtesy Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*)

Plate 35. PORTRAIT OF MADAME X. *John S. Sargent* (1856–1925)

It used to be said that Sargent had some ninety sittings for this portrait. Yet he was never more successful in conveying the impression of a momentary action rapidly noted, which is one of the salient characteristics of his art. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 36. THE WIDOW. *Thomas Couture* (1815–79)
(*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

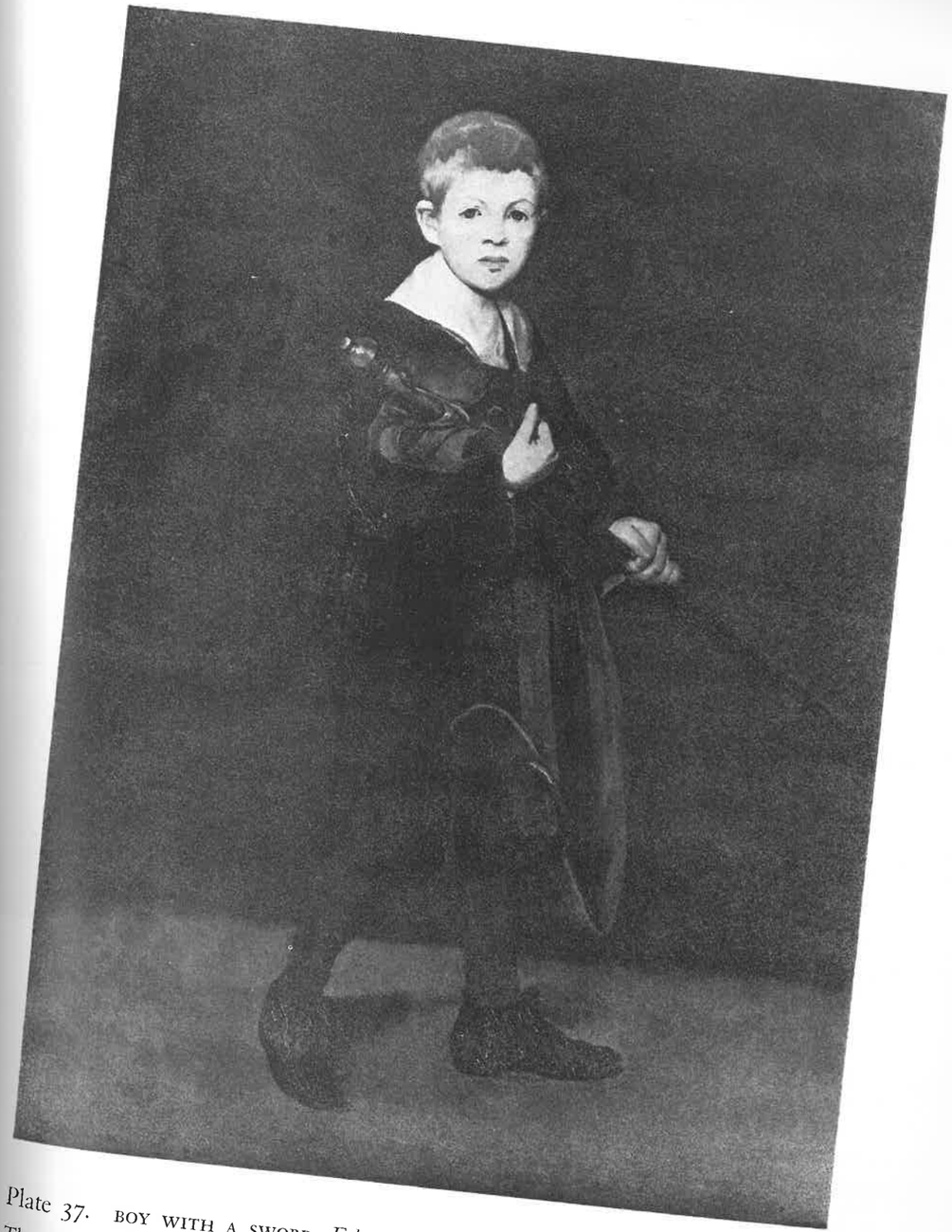


Plate 37. BOY WITH A SWORD. *Edouard Manet* (1832–83)
The debt which Manet owed to his master Couture will become evident to anyone who compares this reproduction with the one on the opposite page. It is even more apparent in the paintings themselves. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 38. AT THE MILLINER'S (pastel). *Edgar Degas* (1834–1917)

Few painters of any period have had greater feeling for expressive gesture than Degas and perhaps no other painter has achieved such variety and originality in composition or has devised such unusual schemes of color allied to representational truth. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 39. LE PAIN BÉNIT. *Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret* (1852–1929)

It is singular that, while a certain group of French plein-air painters have been so much featured, the work of such men as Dagnan-Bouveret has been largely forgotten. Dagnan was considered a leader in his day and he certainly drew and composed better than many of his contemporaries who have benefited by recent fashions. (*Photo Giraudon*)

Plate 40. FAMILY GROUP READING. *Mary Cassatt* (1845–1926)
Perhaps no other painter combines a perception of out-of-door color phenomena with fine drawing and distinguished designing to the same degree as Miss Cassatt. Though she exerted little direct influence on the art of her time, no set of reproductions dealing with American impressionist painting would be representative without an example of her very distinguished art. (*Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art*)

Plate 41. IN THE COUNTRY. *Alfred Stevens* (1828–1906)
The consummate craftsmanship and beautiful surface quality characteristic of Alfred Stevens' best work is admittedly unsurpassed in the painting of any epoch. He was also a thorough master of the other elements of his art. The knowledge, methods, and skills which went into the creation of such accomplished painting are as completely lost to us, half a century after his death, as are the technique of Titian or the working methods which produced the great Chinese porcelains or twelfth-century stained glass. (*Courtesy Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts*)

Plate 42. JOAN OF ARC. *Jules Bastien-Lepage* (1848–84)

This painting is probably the most successful attempt ever made to treat a poetically conceived historical subject in terms of out-of-doors impressionism. Opinions differ as to the degree of the picture's success, but it is likely to remain the nearest approach to accomplishing two seemingly incompatible objectives, the evocation of an imagined scene and close study of visual phenomena in a broadly diffused light. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 43. JOAN OF ARC. *J. A. D. Ingres* (1780–1867)

It is interesting to compare this painting with the one on the opposite page and to observe how the stylizations which we connect with academic art were used by Ingres with consummate skill to give the picture the character of a symbol rather than to suggest how the actual scene might have looked. (*Photo Giraudon*)

Plate 44. THE OLD CUPBOARD DOOR. *William M. Harnett* (1848–92)
This painting is a quite amazing example of Harnett's skill in rendering detail and thereby giving an effect of verisimilitude which startles and amuses the spectator. This is indeed the "factual representation" so often referred to in contemporary art criticism. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

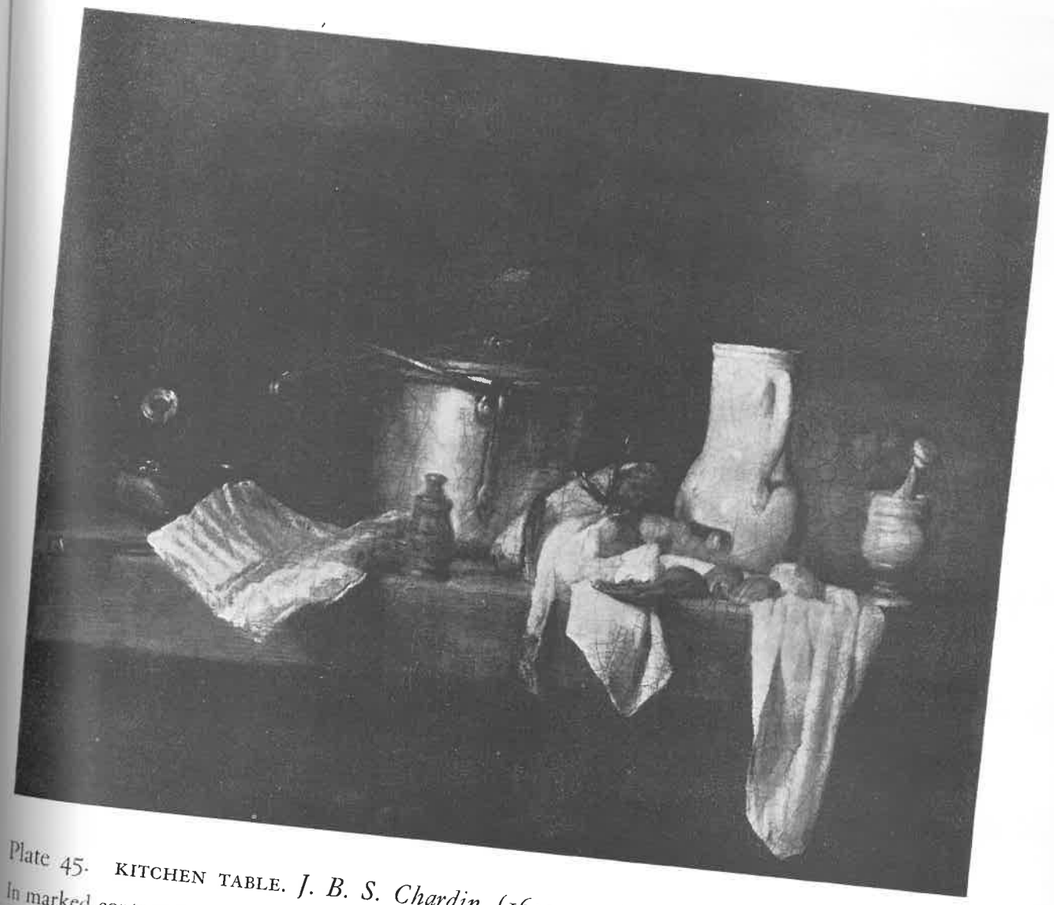


Plate 45. KITCHEN TABLE. *J. B. S. Chardin* (1699–1779)
In marked contrast to the Harnett on the opposite page this Chardin, to which the reproduction does not do justice, presents us with a synthesis of the visual impression of a great artist which raises the rendering of commonplace objects to the dignity of great art. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

Plate 46. PORTRAIT OF THE PAINTER BACHELIER (pastel).
J. B. S. Chardin (1699–1779)

The impressionist character of Chardin's art is especially apparent in his magnificent pastels. (*Courtesy Fogg Museum of Art*)

Plate 47 JESSICA. *Dennis Bunker* (1861–90)

One of the most beautifully studied heads in American art. The transitions of tone and the minor shifts are stated with great subtlety without losing the larger color relations. At the same time the edges and accents throughout the canvas are given exactly the relative degree of definition perceptible to eyes focused so as to take in the entire area depicted. In the painting itself the young woman appears to exist in space, surrounded by atmosphere and light and shadow. Yet the draftsmanship is so sure that we never lose our sense of the form in all its inherent loveliness. This combination of qualities has only rarely been attained in the painting of a head. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

Plate 48. THE DAUGHTERS OF EDWARD BOIT. *John S. Sargent* (1856–1925)

The handling of this large canvas is adapted to the rendering of a single impression with a broad focus of vision, the interest being largely centered on the little girl sitting on the rug. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

Plate 49. THE DAUGHTER OF EDWARD BOIT (detail). *John S. Sargent* (1856–1925)

A detail of the visual center of the painting reproduced on the opposite page showing the treatment of edges and accents consistent with unity under the conditions described. The total effect of the picture has great breadth and carrying power. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

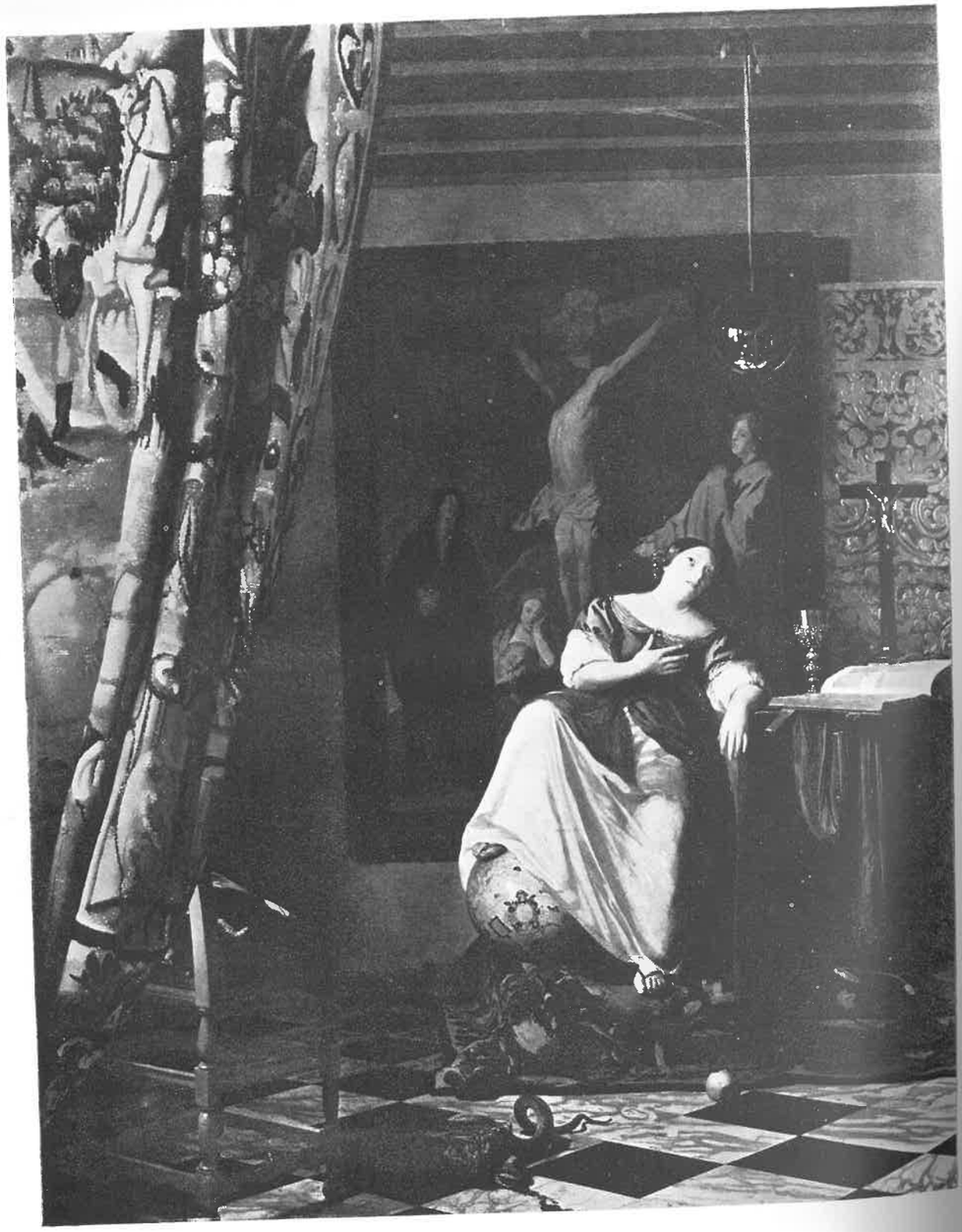


Plate 50. ALLEGORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. *Jan Vermeer of Delft* (1632-75)

The very imperfections of this particular Vermeer help to demonstrate what a sense of dignity and style can be created by great impressionist painting. The draped lay figure around which the composition is based is so palpably absurd that it is impossible to take its allegorical implications seriously. But the picture remains deeply impressive because of the marvelous rendering of the arrangement which the artist set up before his easel with his fine sense of composition and design, and because of the largeness of vision with which he kept the unity of a single impression. The painting of the chair, the floor, and the objects on it, as well as the rug and globe, constitutes one of the most magical passages in all painting. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

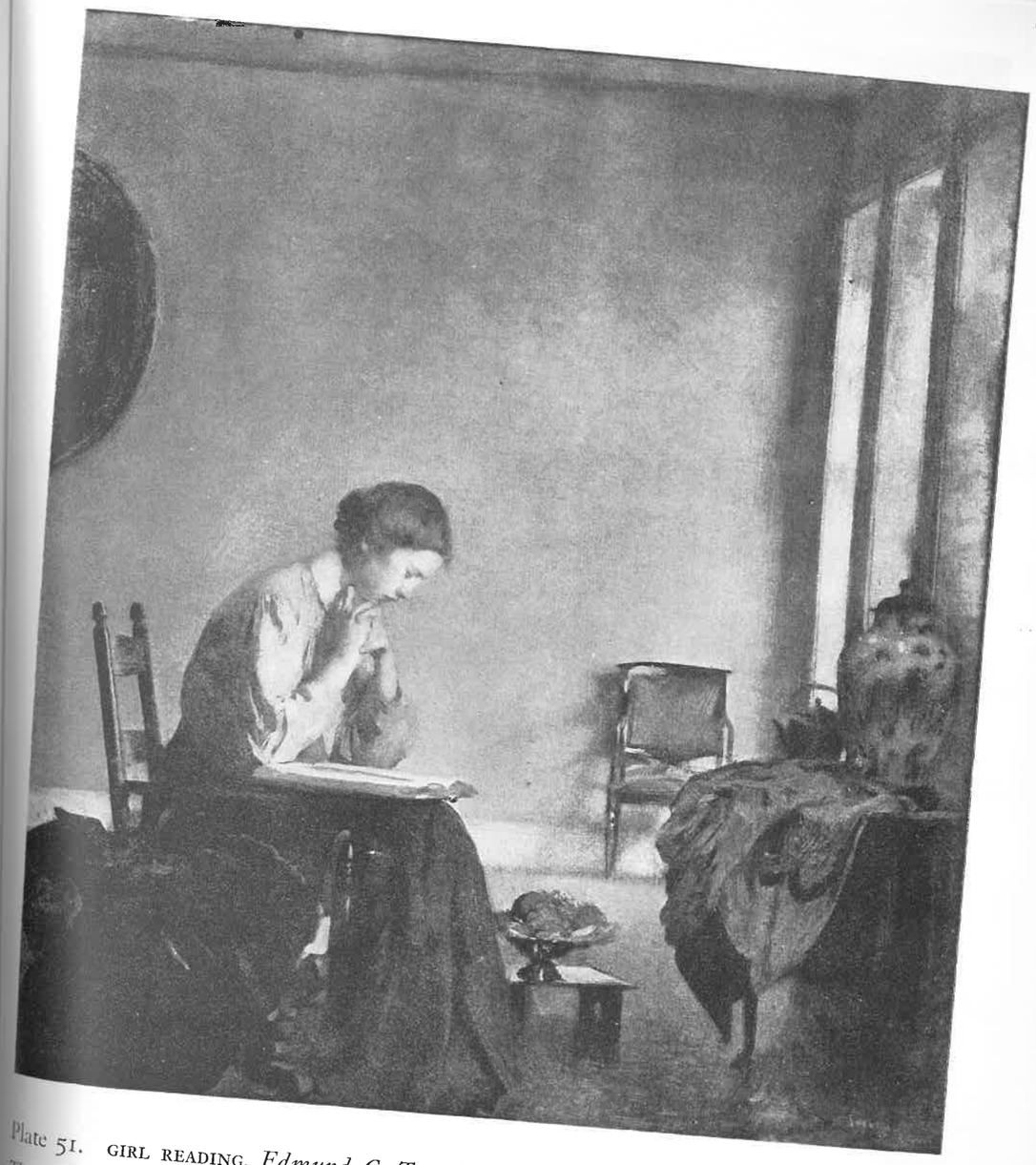


Plate 51. GIRL READING. *Edmund C. Tarbell* (1862–1938)

The reproduction suggests Tarbell's fine spacing and well-balanced distribution of light and dark masses but gives no idea of the sensitively perceived color or the beautiful quality of the handling. In the photograph the area behind the figure seems a little empty, whereas in the painting this passage is made interesting by a masterly rendering of the shimmering light on the surface of the wall and the subtle shifts of color occasioned by the penumbra which veils the upper part of the picture. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

Plate 52. PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM WARREN. *Frederick P. Vinton* (1846–1911)

It is hard to understand why Vinton's dignified portraits are neglected today. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

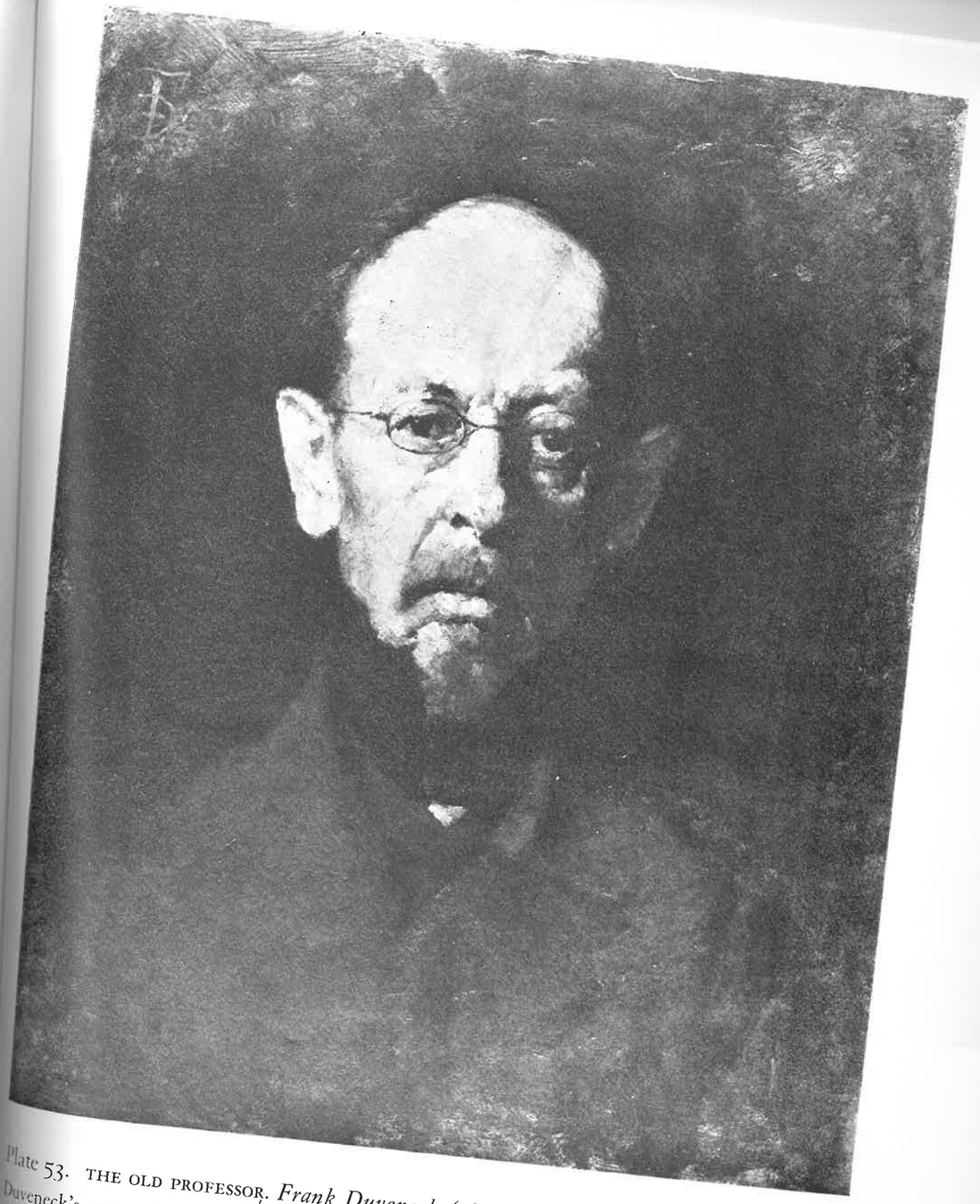


Plate 53. THE OLD PROFESSOR. *Frank Duveneck* (1848–1919)

Duveneck's extraordinary gift for handling paint to create beautiful and expressive surfaces has, in conjunction with his other qualities, given him a position unique in American art, and in the art of the world for that matter. It is notable that his brilliant manipulation always expresses and enhances the structure of what he painted and never loses control of the form. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

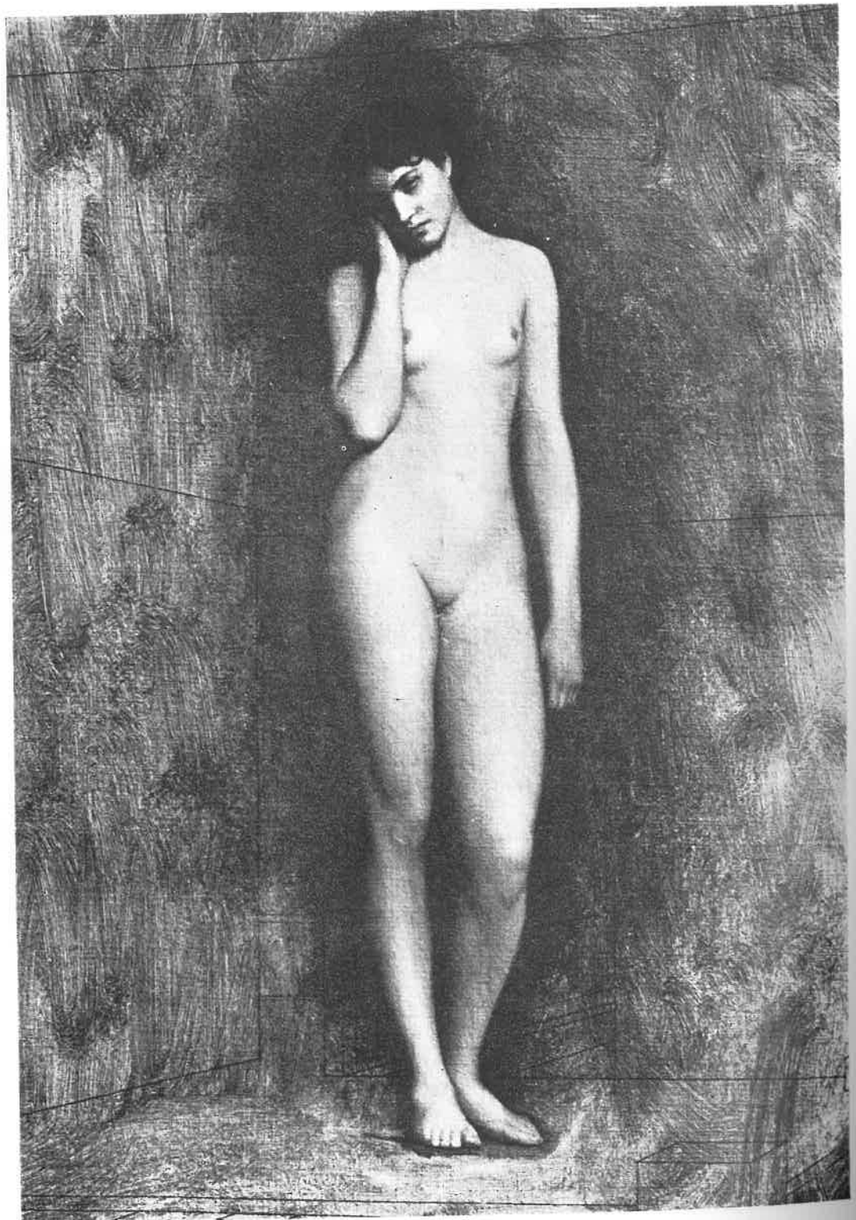


Plate 54. GREEK SLAVE. *Jean Léon Gérome* (1824–1904)

This unfinished painting and the one reproduced on the opposite page point the contrast between the academic and impressionist approach. Gérome proceeded from a firmly established outline and his interest was concentrated on the figure itself from the start, though the carefully worked-out perspective indicates that he had the rest of his picture planned and possibly sketched in a separate study. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

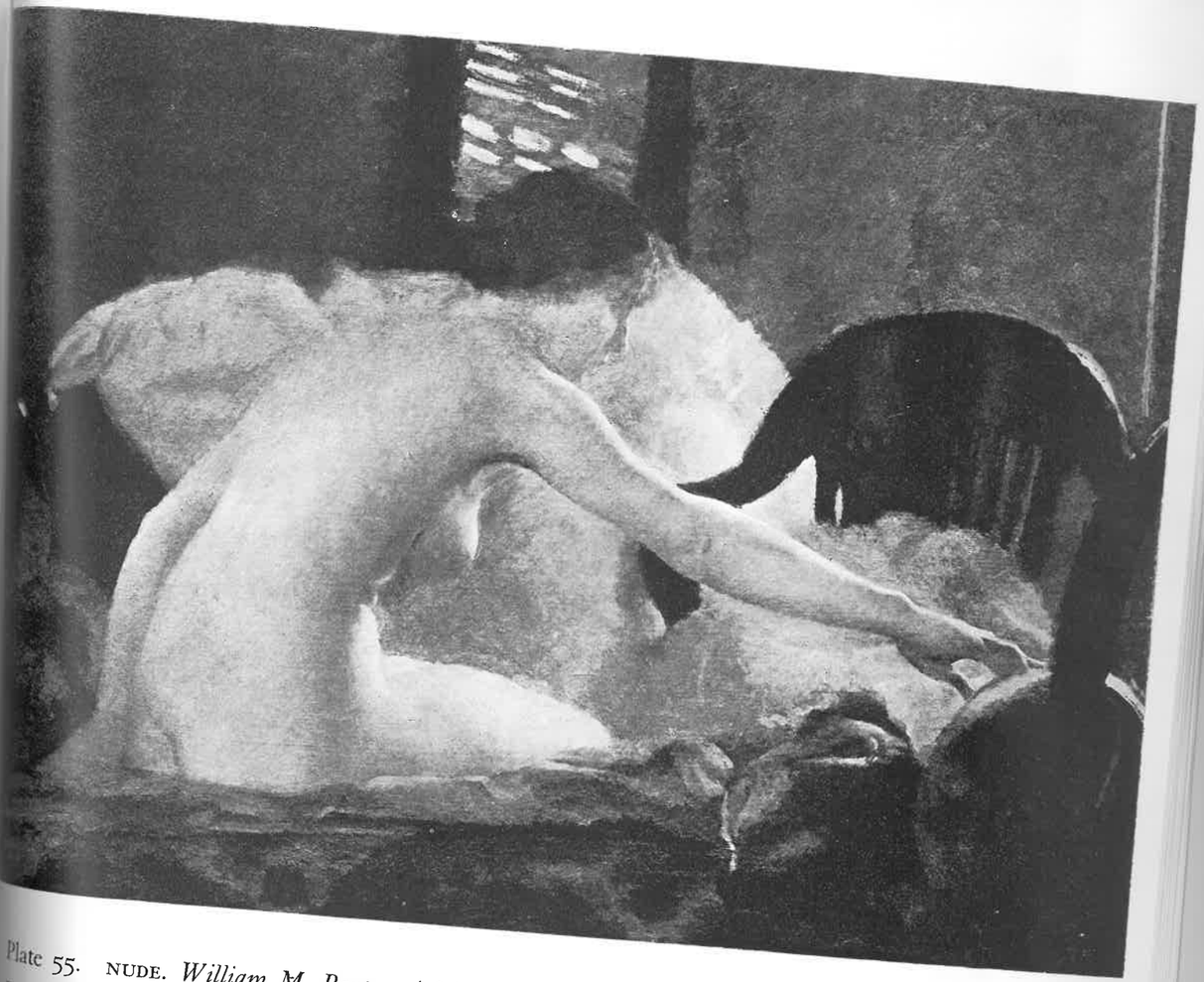


Plate 55. NUDE. *William M. Paxton* (1869–1941)

Paxton, on the other hand, made his composition by moving the model and the furniture about the room until they formed the balanced design he wanted. In starting the picture he laid in the broader areas of color as they appeared to his eye without particular regard to what these areas represented, gradually adding detail and refining the shapes. Carried to their ultimate limits by very competent painters the two methods could lead to quite similar results. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

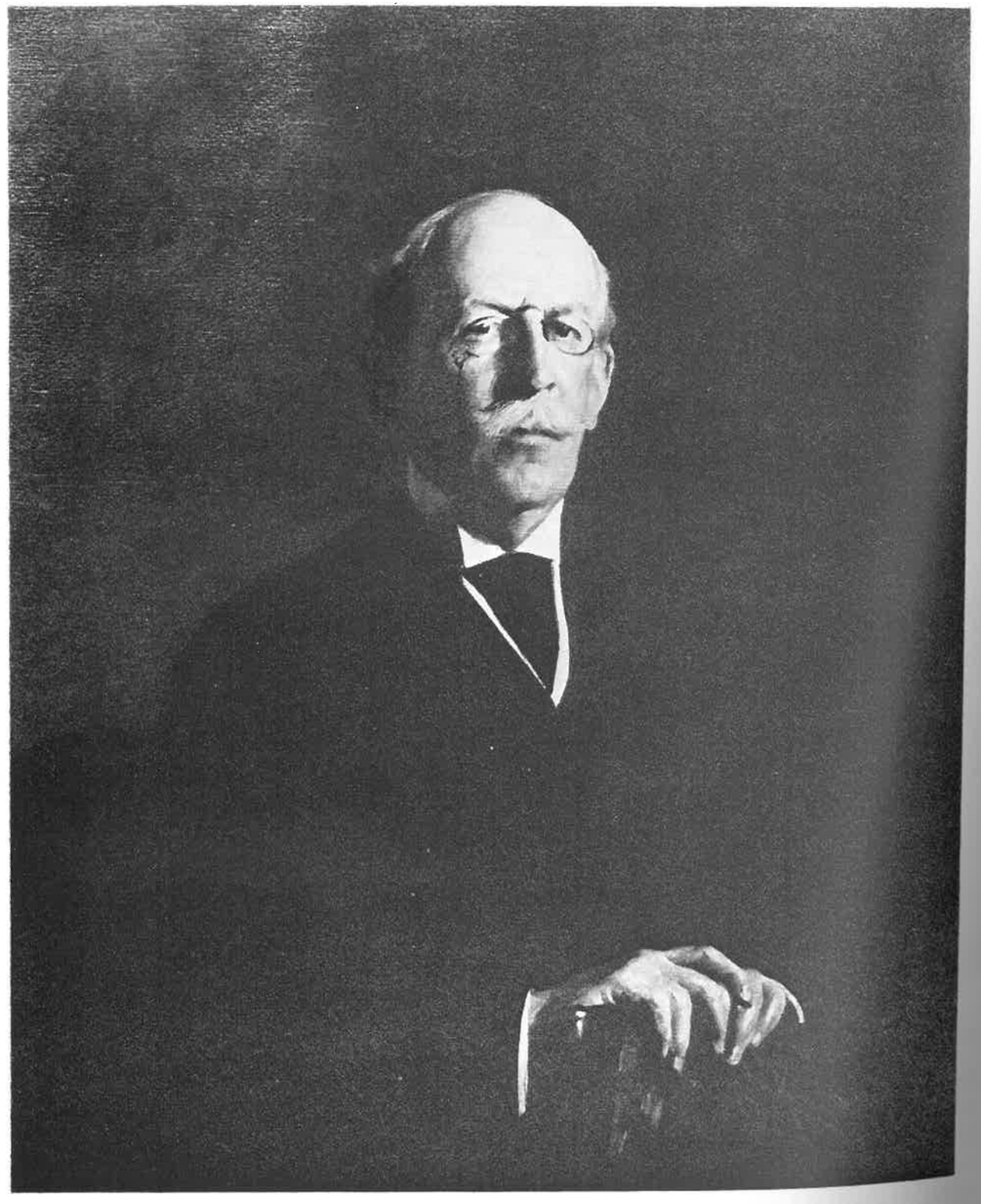


Plate 56. FRANCIS I. AMORY, ESQ. *Joseph DeCamp* (1858–1923)

DeCamp was perhaps the most soundly trained American painter of his generation. Because his portraits are almost entirely privately owned they are insufficiently known to the public today. They rank with the best American portraiture of any period.

Plate 57. THE GREEN DOLMAN. *William M. Paxton* (1869–1941)

A picture started directly in paint after a few summary indications had been made on the canvas in charcoal. It is very remarkable that an artist working in this way should have achieved so perfect a placement of the figure in relation to the total area of the canvas. This impromptu approach was not Paxton's usual practice.

Plate 58. POUTING (BOUDERIE). *Edgar Degas* (1834–1917)

Degas could point an anecdote as forcefully as anyone when he chose, turning his amazing feeling for composition and gesture to that end. (*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

Plate 59. CARRIAGES AT THE RACES. *Edgar Degas* (1834–1917)

The humdrum material of everyday life has been woven into a pattern of extraordinary inventiveness and distinction. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

Plate 60. REVERIE. *Edmund C. Tarbell* (1864–1938)

This picture is an example of a late phase of nineteenth-century impressionism. Contrasting edges, areas deliberately left unfinished, "lost and found" passages, and luscious handling of pigment have become ends in themselves. In this particular canvas the result is very beautiful but, carried a step further and used with less skill, these methods become empty mannerisms substituted for the serious study of aspects. (*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

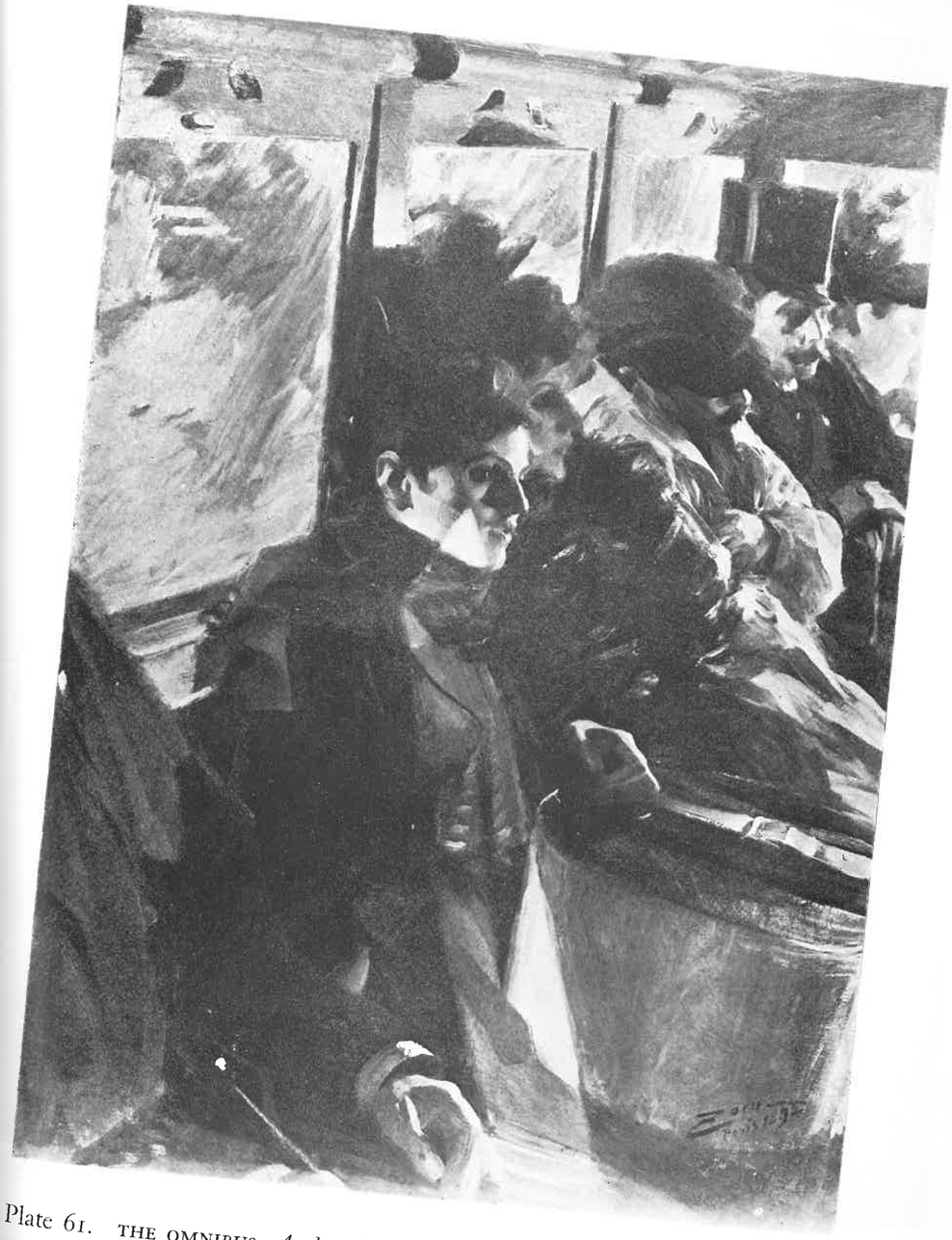


Plate 61. THE OMNIBUS. *Anders Zorn* (1860–1920)

An example of the later nineteenth-century tendency to center interest on an effect of light rather than on the objects illuminated. (*Courtesy Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*)

Plate 62. ALISON. *William Sergeant Kendall* (1869–1938)

This painting and the DeCamp reproduced on the following page were for some years the property of the Albright Art Gallery at Buffalo. Although both are excellent examples of the work of artists very highly esteemed in the early years of the century and were bought for large prices by the museum, they were discarded and sold at auction in 1943 by the museum administration together with a large group of pictures which did not conform to the esthetic taste of those controlling the museum policies at the time. (*Courtesy R. C. Vose Galleries*)

Plate 63. THE BLUE MANDARIN COAT. *Joseph DeCamp* (1858–1923)

Plate 64. PORTRAIT OF A LADY IN BLACK. *William M. Chase* (1849–1916)
(*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*)

2. WOMAN WITH CATS. *Pablo Picasso*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

Plate 65. 1. CARMELINA. *Henri Matisse*
(*Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*)

Examples of "modern" execution and design

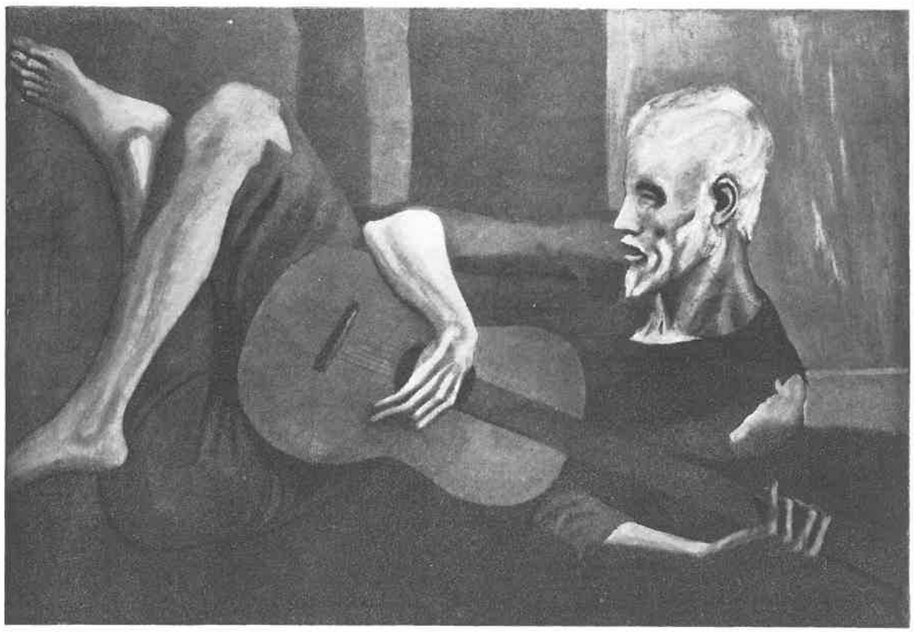


Plate 66. 1. WOMAN WITH MIRROR. *Pablo Picasso*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

2. THE GUITARIST. *Pablo Picasso*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

Examples of "modern" execution and design

Plate 67. 1. OPEN WINDOW IN NICE. *Raoul Dufy*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

2. THE RABBI OF VITEBSK. *Marc Chagall*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

Examples of "modern" execution and design

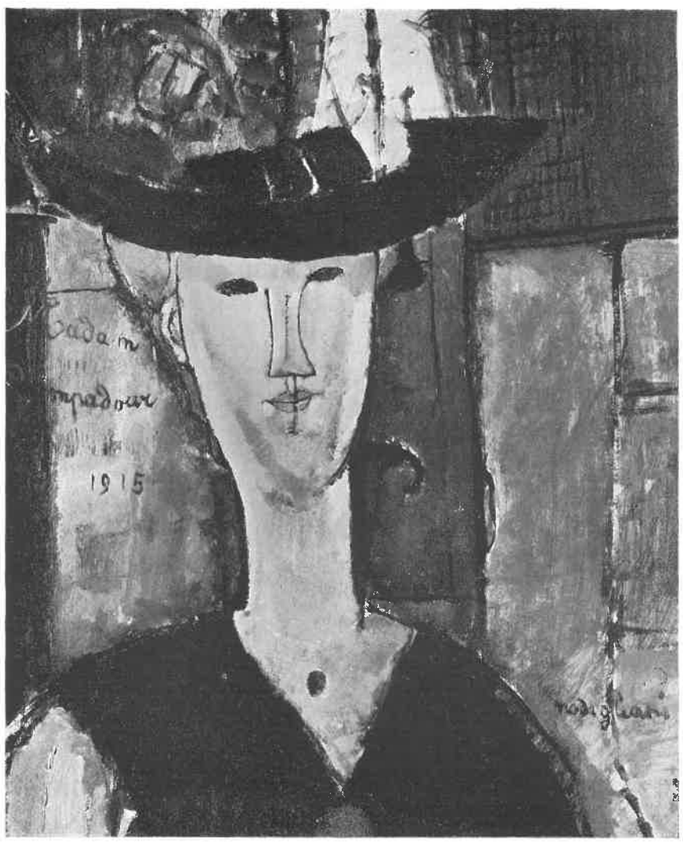
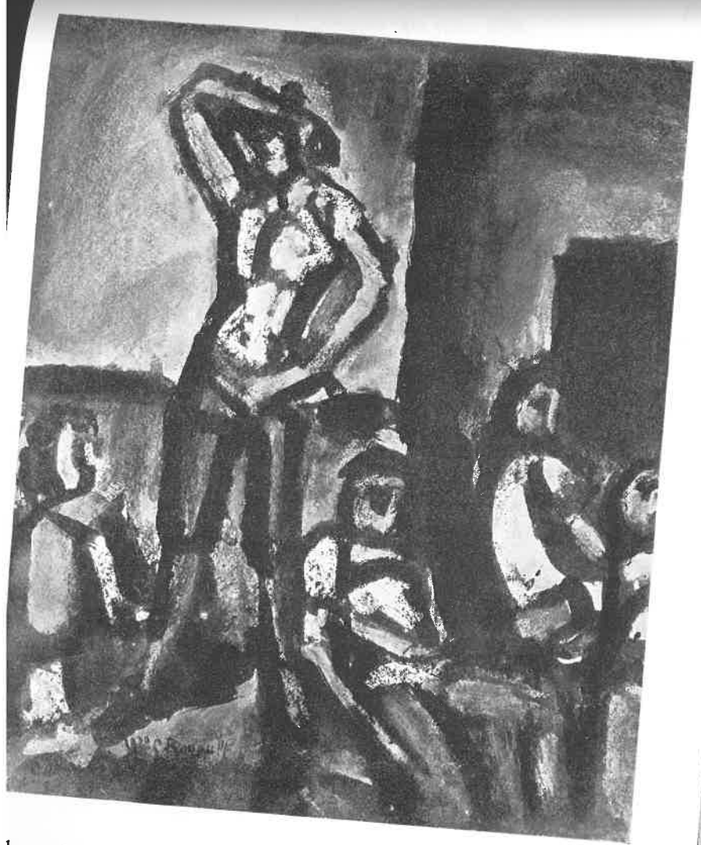


Plate 68. 1. MME CATHERINE HESSLING. *André Derain*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

2. MADAME POMPADOUR. *Amedeo Modigliani*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

Examples of "modern" execution and design



late 69. 1. THE WORKERS. *Georges Rouault*
Courtesy Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.)

2. WOMAN AND CHILDREN IN A LANDSCAPE. *Georges Rouault*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

Examples of "modern" execution and design

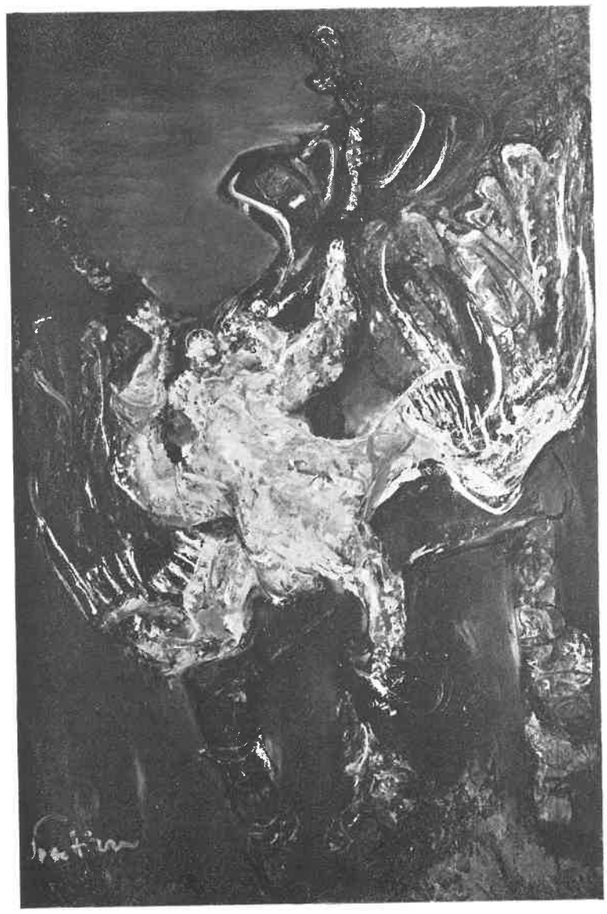


Plate 70. 1. THE LEADER, ZAPATA. *Jose Clemente Orozco*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

2. DEAD FOWL. *Chaim Soutine*
(*Courtesy Art Institute of Chicago*)

Examples of "modern" execution and design

Plate 71. 1. GIRL WITH A MASK. *Diego Rivera*
(*Courtesy Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.*)

2. THE LITTLE NURSE. *Galván*
(*Courtesy Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.*)

Examples of "modern" execution and design

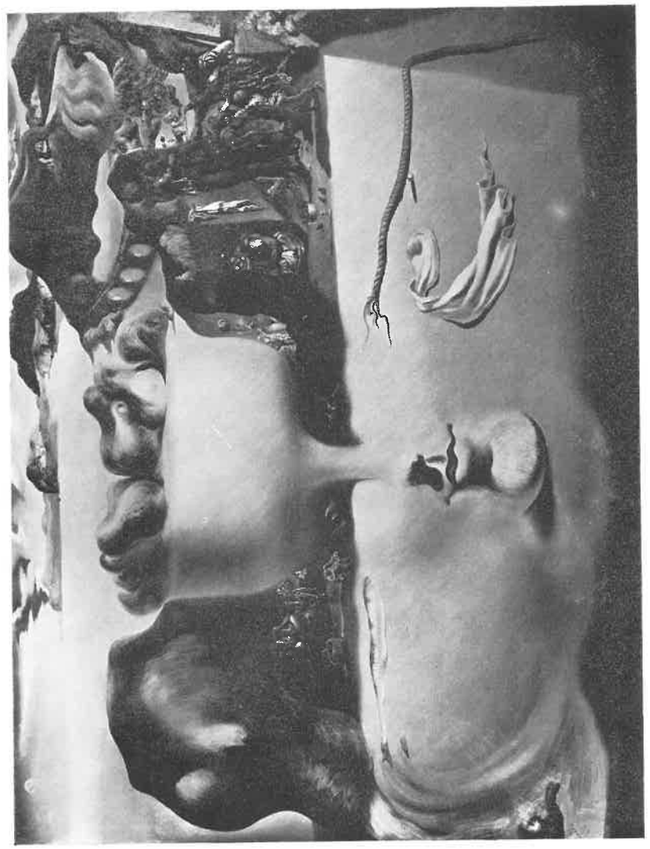
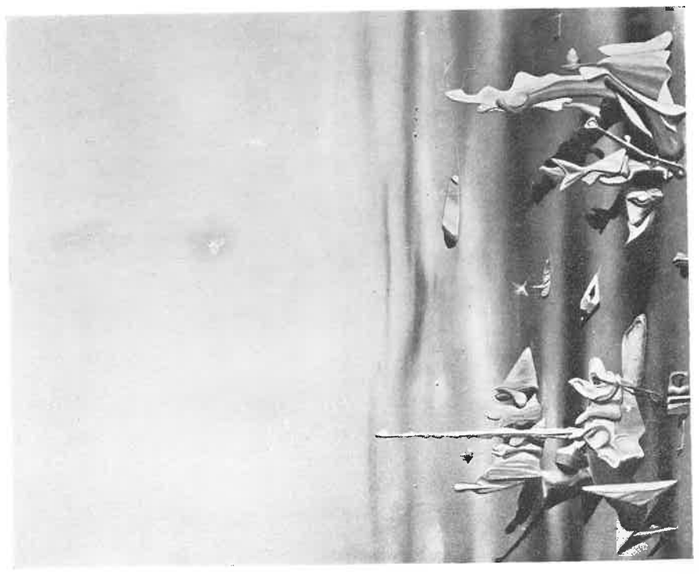


Plate 72. 2. APPARITION OF FACE AND FRUIT DISH ON A BEACH. *Salvador Dali*
(Courtesy Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.)



1. LES CINQ ETRANGERS. *Yves Tanguy*
(Courtesy Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Conn.)

Examples of "modern" execution and design

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TWILIGHT OF PAINTING
R. H. Ives Gammell

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Feb. 2, 1947

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